Riding with Strangers

An Ethnographic Inquiry into Contemporary Practices of European Hitchhikers

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Riding with Strangers:  
An Ethnographic Inquiry into Contemporary Practices  
of European Hitchhikers  

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I inhale great draughts of space,
the East and the West are mine, and the North and the South are mine.

Walt Whitman

Song of the Open Road, 1856

Dedicated to all hitchhikers
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1. Introduction

Hitchhiking, the practice of soliciting strangers for rides in private or commercial vehicles, is in fact alive and well, despite being commonly declared to be a historical relict no longer applicable or practical in modern times. Although clearly the times of ten, thirty, fifty aspiring travelers congregating at a promising spot are over and passed into the realm of legend, hitchhiking is by no means dead. A small, yet arguably growing number of people is keeping it alive, investing it with new meanings, adapting the practice to modern times and inventing ways of dealing with the old and new challenges hitchhiking poses. And while a certain fraternity and solidarity among hitchhikers is likely to always have existed, the internet has enabled hitchers to come together and form a community and a network of support. In the modern position of marginality that hitchhikers occupy, they need each other more than ever: “Many regard hitchhikers as unsettled, transitional and non-integrated, their mobility deviant, suspect and potentially dangerous.”

The public perception of the present-day feasibility of the practice is imbued with “a diffuse sense of threat: although convincing evidence that hitch-hiking has in reality become more dangerous is lacking, the belief that this is so has become part of common sense.” In this way, there is a twofold danger associated with the practice, threatening both driver and hitcher. As a sociospatial and signifying practice, hitchhiking is “corporeal and embodied, [and] coded to a particular role or lifestyle”. Uptake of the practice, particularly the long-distance variety, often coincides with a more or less deliberate change of perspectives, practices, and life trajectories, which may become more encompassing as other domains of life are placed outside of the sphere of financial economics. It can thus be constitutive of a change in lifestyle.

Hitchhiking as an area of academic inquiry has the potential to serve as a crystallization point of many basic human and social constellations. It is a catalyzer, an incubator of human relations, compressing social dynamics to a higher intensity, bringing to light the many implications of trust, risk, and security, our notions of charity and who deserves it, conceptions of gift and exchange, as well as perceptions of good and bad fortune. Within Cultural Anthropology, the subject can be situated in several current research fields,

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   Note: Some sources spell the practice as hitch-hiking, and will be cited accordingly, while I will maintain the non-hyphenated spelling hitchhiking.
albeit rather marginally in some, more centrally in others. The spheres of anthropological analysis most pertinent to hitchhiking are those concerned with contemporary mobilities, globalization, and tourism studies, especially in the field of independent travel research; furthermore scenes, youth- and counter-cultures, culture of leisure, and lifestyles, particularly nomadic existence. The subject is open to inquiries into the perception and construction of (public) space and into the performance, enactment and conception of gender, emotion, and the body.

The focus of anthropology lies not on the production of putatively objective truths, all-encompassing classification or causal explanation, but on subjective ascriptions of meaning, personal significance, and experience. No attempt will be made in this thesis to classify or categorize the ranks of the hitchhikers. No archetype of ‘the hitchhiker’ will emerge in this text. What is being contemplated here is a highly diverse group of fierce individualists, and to try to describe them in a simplifying manner would be doing them injustice. The people under scrutiny here would refuse to be labeled, typecast or neatly divided. In trying to “understand ‘community’ by seeking to capture members’ experience of it”\(^4\), the focus lies not on form or structure, but on subjective meaning.

The search for active long-distance hitchhikers willing to partake in the study could be done in three distinct ways.\(^5\) The first and most impractical appeared to be the attempt to seek out hitchhikers while engaged in the practice, by taking the role of a driver picking them up, and then hoping to collect ethnographic data. Clearly, this would take a lot of effort and promise sparse results, as hitchhikers are few and far between, thus hard to find. The second possible approach involves hospitality exchange networks\(^6\), which are quite popular among hitchhikers and might have allowed me to invite those traveling through Hamburg to stay in my apartment in exchange for an interview. However, like the first option this would have resulted in a study based entirely on second-hand knowledge. The third way to get into contact with active hitchhikers is to seek out the occasions on which they meet, and partake in their activities, namely races and gatherings. This was the approach realized in this study. It not only allowed for encountering them in significant numbers while among themselves, but also offered the opportunity to collect considerable amounts of auto-ethnographic material, as each visit to their gatherings involved hitchhiking there and back again, and actively hitchhiking played an

\(^5\) The focus was on personal encounters, so internet-mediated communication was excluded.
\(^6\) Hospitality exchange networks link travelers to private persons offering a free place for the night in their home. The largest network is couchsurfing.org, but others are also popular, e.g. hospitalityclub.org and bewelcome.org. The recently founded network trustroots.org is geared towards hitchhikers and was created by the same people who developed hitchwiki.org.
important role during the events as well. Participation in these races and gatherings is open to any persons who find themselves capable of hitchhiking. And so, as somebody who has regularly hitchhiked in the past years, I was able to participate without prior negotiations with gatekeepers.

The hitchhiker features in this text as a skillful and knowledgeable traveler, enacting their mobility and identity in relation to a community of practice. The questions this thesis aims to answer revolve around the knowledge and skill involved in the practice, and the processes of assuming an identity as hitchhiker in reciprocal reference to the community. What will be told in this work is a story of becoming: A story of persons becoming hitchhikers, of hitchhikers becoming a community, and the community becoming what it is today. But before examining the present practice and meanings of hitchhiking, a look into its past is in order.

1.1 A Hundred Years of Hitchhiking

1.1.1 The Rise and Fall - Vacillating Popularity

Although it could be argued that the practice of soliciting rides from strangers must have been around ever since there have been rides to solicit, the birth of hitchhiking is usually timed synchronically to that of the automobile, at the beginning of the 20th century: “The hitchhiker was first of all a product of American automobile civilization. He appeared elsewhere only as automobiles became common.” From its inception, the practice has risen and fallen in popularity and acceptance. Having its beginnings during the First World War, “the art apparently declined immediately thereafter. It was taken up again in the 1920’s, with strong overtones of adventure.” It wasn’t until the middle 1920s that the hitchhiker became a familiar figure on the American roadside. Although during its infancy techniques varied greatly, by the end of the 1920s “hitchhikers had gradually developed generally accepted techniques and equipment.” Fuelled by local unemployment, a wider ownership of cars, and the improvement of the road infrastructure, hitchhiking increased in prominence and importance throughout the late 1920s. The great depression forced further multitudes onto the roads.

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7 To avoid awkward her/his, she/he constructions and include persons of non-binary gender identity, single persons of unspecified gender will be referred to using the pronouns ‘they’, ‘their’ etc.
9 Ibid. p. 307.
10 See Ibid. p. 305.
11 Ibid. p. 322.
12 See Ibid. p. 309.
Initially, children on short forays and college students pioneered the practice, but by the 
1930s, the ranks of hitchhikers had diversified to include most societal strata, although 
the former groups still predominated. College students, men and women alike, were 
usually treated as a privileged class, and many felt that laws against hitchhikers ought 
not to apply to them. This made evidence of college status, authentic or fraudulent, a 
very desirable tool for hitchhiking.\textsuperscript{13} Even though occasionally “transients, professional 
beggars, criminals, migratory workers, and general misfits”\textsuperscript{14} have sought rides, the vast 
majority of hitchhikers of the first decades were respectable and reputable: students, 
soldiers, and other people returning home to their families, on an adventure to see 
America, or in search of employment. Hobos and tramps, however, mostly kept to the 
railroad. As Schlebecker notes, the ranks of the hitchhikers have always contained a fair 
portion of women and girls. And as holds true until today, their presence has always 
prompted a great volume of commentary.\textsuperscript{15}

From the beginning, hitchhikers’ motivations were explained to be a combination of four 
incentives: an inability to pay for transportation, an unwillingness to do so, a lack of 
transportation options, and a desire for adventure.\textsuperscript{16} As will be shown, only the second 
and last of these factors have retained their relevance, but other motivations, such as 
environmental concerns, have gained importance among hitchhikers.

Early on, the practice was already met with some disapproval: general public distrust, 
disdainful attitudes towards all forms of begging, and the apprehension of the custom as 
dangerous to driver or passenger resulting in laws against hitchhiking have accompanied 
the practice from its infancy.\textsuperscript{17} Already during the 1920s, the practice was periodically 
condemned by the press, warning drivers of the purported dangers or simply moralizing: 
“Most of these people […] are not dangerous. They are simply immeasurably impu-
dent.”\textsuperscript{18} However, hitchhikers continued to travel in growing numbers, across ever 
greater distances. As more people took up the practice, the number of crimes related to 
it rose accordingly. Crimes were widely reported during the 1930s, and appeared partic-
ularly despicable because the perpetrators had first accepted their victims’ generosity. 
New laws against the practice were passed, but seldom enforced. Most media coverage, 
however, approved of hitchhiking, and cast its practitioners as adventurers rather than

\textsuperscript{13} See Schlebecker 1958. p. 311. 
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid. p. 306. 
\textsuperscript{15} See Ibid. pp. 306-309. 
\textsuperscript{16} See Ibid. pp. 305f. 
\textsuperscript{17} See Ibid. pp. 309f. 
\textsuperscript{18} NEW YORK TIMES. October 12, 1925. p. 20. Cited in: Ibid. p. 308.
beggars or criminals.\textsuperscript{19} It was the very prevalence of the practice, its application by a wide range and large number of people, that “set it apart from other forms of begging, and made it an adjunct of hospitality rather than of charity.”\textsuperscript{20}

The Second World War saw another steep increase in hitchhiking activity in the USA, as on the one hand consumption of tires and gasoline was restricted in a wartime effort, and on the other hand millions of men joined the armed forces and became the new privileged class of hitchhikers. After the war, the practice started to gain popularity also in Europe, especially so in Great Britain, possibly following American soldiers’ example. In the 1950s, the practice became quite popular in Germany, France, and Italy. Just as hitchhiking was gaining traction in Europe, it came under attack in its native country: The early 1950s saw an unprecedented media campaign against the practice, and motorists were frequently warned by newspapers, automobile clubs, and even the FBI not to pick up hitchhikers.\textsuperscript{21} Moreover, access to cars had increased precipitously:

“Many of those who in another era would have been hitchhikers were automobile owners instead. [...] The backbone of the hitchhiking fraternity, the college man, was now in the automobile owning class.”\textsuperscript{22}

These factors combined lead to a noticeable decrease of hitchhikers.

It was the beat literature and attendant culture, whose attitudes, esprit, and thirst for life were so famously captured in Jack Kerouac’s \textit{On the Road}\textsuperscript{23}, who reinstated the practice and established the counter-cultural tradition hitchhiking stands in to this day. The beat generation sought ecstasy, autonomy, and sexual liberation, they lived restlessly, shunned materialism and pursued authenticity in voluntary dispossession. Their mobility was not exclusively through hitchhiking, but the practice could supply many of the things they sought for.\textsuperscript{24} Beat culture prevailed throughout the 1950s, and was later superseded by another, even greater counter-cultural movement: the hippies.

Hippie culture originated in San Francisco in the early 1960s, but soon spread across the USA and beyond. Some beat ideas were picked up, but extended by the missionary ambition to change society. Hippies distanced themselves from the majority society through outer appearance and life philosophy, and developed hitchhiking into a politicized signifying practice. It was emblematically charged with notions such as anti-

\begin{footnotes}
\item[20] Ibid. p. 306.
\item[22] Ibid. p. 326.
\end{footnotes}
authoritarianism and solidarity, and promoted as an ideational alternative to the societ
tal fixation on efficiency and commerce. To hippies, hitchhiking was also charged with
mysticism and romance, and on the ‘hippie trail’ from Europe to India the journey be-
came the reward, an opportunity to expand one’s consciousness through unfamiliar
sensations, and ultimately ‘find oneself’. Through attributions from both within and
outside of the movement, hitchhiking became a political statement. The practice grew
to its greatest popularity in Europe within the context of hippie culture and its communi-
tarian ideals, during the 1960s and early ‘70s. It was interwoven with a generational
conflict between parents and their children, and in the eyes of the conservative majority
it was associated with a slovenly lifestyle. The decline of hippie culture as a mass phe-
nomenon and the rise of new countercultures during the 1970s and ‘80s, such as punk
and gothic, precipitated an eventually steep decline in hitchhiking, the development of
which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Summing up, in public perception the practice has been regarded as respectable or dis-
reputable in several ups and downs. This has been influenced by who and how many
people hitchhiked, how public institutions treated the practice, how the media negotiat-
ed crimes related to it, and larger societal factors, especially crises. While war and eco-
nomic plight have caused an increase in hitchhikers, there have always been attempts at
social control of the phenomenon through institutions of authority, namely the law,
intelligence and police, but furthermore automobile clubs and the press. Thus, an ele-
ment of deviance has been associated with the practice from early on. This is connected
to the image of adventure, which has gained in importance as more practical motivations receded: that which is forbidden, frowned-upon or disfavored has always held a
certain appeal.

1.1.2 The Great Decline

Hitchhiking’s loss of popularity, acceptance and legitimacy at the end of the 20th centu-
ry can generally be elucidated by four factors. The first is access to private mobility,
which had been steeply rising for several decades and by the end of the century includ-
ed many societal groups that were previously carless. Like no other object of individual
consumption, the car dominates the discourse on what constitutes a good life. It grants
status, is the bearer of sign values such as safety, success, sexuality, and masculinity, and
it marginalizes all other mobilities. The privacy of the car-as-home defines everything

25 See FRIEDRICH, Kathrin; LAFIN, Lysette: Unterwegs. Trampen früher und heute. In: KRÖGER, Sarah; VETTER,
Andrea (Eds.): Weltweitweg. Beobachtungen zum Backpacking. (=Berliner Blätter, Special Issue 49).
external, particularly those *not-in-cars*, as an alien other, marginalizing the carless.\(^{26}\) The second factor is the consistently growing network of other affordable transport options, such as cheap fare buses, trains and planes, and organized rideshare platforms. This development significantly undermined hitchhiking out of financial motivation or lack of options. While rideshares are occasionally referred to as an arranged, allegedly safer form of hitchhiking, I disagree and contend that there is a qualitative difference\(^ {27}\) setting the two mobilities apart. The third circumstance involved in the decline of hitchhiking was a general deterioration of societal trust in the stranger\(^ {28}\) and a widespread development of risk-averse attitudes\(^ {29}\), a process described as the evolvement of a *culture of fear*\(^ {30}\). Individualization and the high esteem of individual merit in post-industrial neoliberal capitalism have contributed to an erosion of solidarity\(^ {31}\), reducing acts of fellowship and neighborliness. While these factors aren’t quite as easily demonstrable as an increase in car ownership, their effects are real and felt throughout society. Finally, the fourth factor that was instrumental in the diminishment of hitchhiking was a sensationalist media coverage and threatening representations in popular culture, such as the movie *The Hitcher*\(^ {32}\). The coverage of several well-publicized hitchhiking-related murder trials in 1995 and ‘96\(^ {33}\) has done its part to cement this image of menace. In casting the practice as an inherently hazardous thing of the past, its practitioners were depicted as either perilously naive, or criminally dangerous.\(^ {34}\) Given the new definition of hitching as location-independently, always and inevitably hazardous, the popular budget travel

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\(^{27}\) Although some similarities exist, rideshares lack several of the crucial factors that significantly shape the hitchhiking experience, such as spontaneity, uncertainty, and deliberate hospitality. The roles of and relationship between driver and passenger are based upon a financial rather than social interaction, making the ride essentially an exchange between customer and service provider.


\(^{34}\) See Chesters; Smith 2001. p. 3.
guidebook series *Lonely Planet* has abandoned encouraging the practice in the 1990s, and now cautions against it.

By the end of the century, the cumulative effect of the factors discussed here had on the one hand minimized hitchhiking activity in Europe and elsewhere, and on the other hand discursively defined those who do adhere to the practice as disreputable in the eyes of many. Thus, in 2001 it was assessed to be quite possible that “hitch-hiking has entered an irretrievable downward spiral, in which hitch-hikers have become by definition marginal, deviant, possibly criminal, and certainly risky.”

### 1.1.3 Not Dead Yet - Hitchhiking Renaissance

It seems today, however, that the downward spiral was not in fact irretrievable. In the last decade an abundance of texts, images, films, networks, and events has emerged to renegotiate the social, political, ecological, and economical value of hitchhiking, challenging the common notions declaring the practice a historical relict, no longer feasible, or simply too dangerous to attempt. The internet has played an important role in the resurgence of hitchhiking, allowing practitioners to get into contact with one another, share information, and encourage prospective newcomers. In an effort to re-legitimize the practice and battle prejudice with information, several online platforms have emerged, of which *hitchwiki.org* is the most widely used. It is the major hitchhiking site and hub of much community activity. Here, many valuable tips on the execution of the practice, a calendar of hitchhiking-related events, as well as an interactive global map showing promising hitching locations, and numerous other materials are provided to aspiring and experienced hitchhikers. Another directory to hitchhiking positions can be found on the location database *hitchbase.com*. A third highly active online venue is *couchsurfing.org*, namely its hitchhiking forums. In Germany, which is one of the major hitchhiking nations, the primary sites containing information on and representing hitchhiking are *abgefahren-ev.de*, *tramprennen.org*, *sporttrampen.de* and *anhalterfreunde.de*. They make reference to their goal of promoting hitchhiking as a modern and environmentally friendly form of mobility separate from its connotation of hippie romanticism, or even fustiness. All but the latter site represent officially regis-

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36 The municipal government of Kiel has reacted to calls for a more hitcher-friendly infrastructure by installing Germany’s first officially designated hitchhiking location, modeled after several Dutch cities’ example. See Anonymous: Daumen raus an Kiel’s neuer Trampstelle. 2015. Published online: www.ndr.de/nachrichten/schleswig-holstein/Daumen-raus-an-Kiels-neuer-Tramperstelle,trampen120.html [last accessed July 7th, 2016].
tered associations\textsuperscript{37} devoted to the practice and its promotion through the provision of information to drivers and hitchers, the organization of races, and the conduction of public relations. Founded between 2006 and 2011, these associations take example in Russian\textsuperscript{38}, Polish\textsuperscript{39} and Lithuanian\textsuperscript{40} hitchhiking clubs. In eastern Europe, hitchhiking and hitchhiking clubs stand in a long tradition, and the practice is far more widespread and accepted than in western Europe.\textsuperscript{41} Other notable European hitchhiking associations, societies, or clubs and their respective races are established in Belgium\textsuperscript{42}, the Czech Republic\textsuperscript{43}, Denmark\textsuperscript{44}, Finland\textsuperscript{45}, France\textsuperscript{46}, Hungary\textsuperscript{47}, Latvia\textsuperscript{48}, Switzerland\textsuperscript{49}, and the United Kingdom\textsuperscript{50}. While a few races serve as fundraisers to the benefit of charity organizations, most are conducted without a declared objective\textsuperscript{51}. Further small-scale races and gatherings are organized informally through countless national or regional hitchhiking groups online. The phenomenon of races organized by hitchhiking clubs and associations can yet be described as emergent due to the relative recency of these events’ appearance.

\textsuperscript{37} Deutsche Autostop Gesellschaft Abgefahren e.V., founded in 2006 as a non-profit association, currently has about 300 members and annually hosts the German Hitchhiking Championships, attracting between 40 and 100 participants. Since 2008, Club of Room - Autostop! e.V. organizes a yearly multi-stage charity race with annually growing participation (160 in 2015) to the benefit of Viva con Agua and Pro Asyl. Deutsche Trampsport Gemeinschaft was founded in 2011 and has since organized two races per year on average. These races are closest to the Russian model, combining hitchhiking with orienteering and hiking. It is the only German hitchhiking association to receive funding from the European Union. A fourth large race, the BreakOut charity race, emerged in 2014 with about 50 participants. Their website however contains little information on hitchhiking itself.


\textsuperscript{39} E.g. Polish Adventure Club: www.klubprzygody.pl/index.php?strona=poddzial&dzial=autostop [last accessed May 25th, 2016].

\textsuperscript{40} E.g. Vilnius Hitch-hiking Club: www.autostop.lt/ [last accessed May 25th, 2016].

\textsuperscript{41} An investigation into the Russian-speaking hitchhiking community remains for a different scholar to conduct.

\textsuperscript{42} Route du Soleil: www.routedusoleil.org/rds16 [last accessed May 25th, 2016].

\textsuperscript{43} Czech Hitchhiking Championship: www.jedu.cz/cs/mistrovstvi-cr-v-autostopu [last accessed May 25th, 2016].

\textsuperscript{44} Blaffernationen: www.blaffernationen.dk/blaf16/ [last accessed May 25th, 2016].

\textsuperscript{45} HitchPro: www.hitchball4000.fi/ [last accessed May 25th, 2016].

\textsuperscript{46} E.g. Stop & Go: www.stopandgosp.wix.com/stopandgo [last accessed May 25th, 2016].

\textsuperscript{47} Pouce d’Or: www.poucedor.fr/ [last accessed May 25th, 2016].

\textsuperscript{48} HungaroHitch: www.hungarohitch.com/index.html [last accessed May 25th, 2016].

\textsuperscript{49} Īkšķojens Hitchhiking Race: www.piedzivojumagars.lv/pied257v257jums.html [last accessed May 25th, 2016].

\textsuperscript{50} Autostopverein Schweiz: www.autostopp.ch/en/hitchhiking-championship/ [last accessed May 25th, 2016].

\textsuperscript{51} Although implicit aims range widely: for fun, adventure, cultural learning, expansion of horizons, meeting like-minded individuals (again), offering access to the practice to novices, and publicly normalizing the practice. See Chapter 4.2.1 Finding the Others.
Apart from these websites and activities, an abundance of materials embracing the practice has been created in the last decade, ranging from autobiographical travel accounts, collections of anecdotes, zines and guidebooks, over documentary films, feature films, and entire film festivals to music, novels, online magazines and a myriad of personal blogs chronicling individuals’ journeys. These representations of the practice in popular culture constitute a wealth of sources from which to draw for further research into the matter. They bear testimony to the vibrancy and verve of present-day European hitchhiking.

Having outlined the history of the practice, at this point the perspectives academia has assumed in relation to hitchhiking will be reviewed, before introducing the specific community-related events that I have participated in during the course of this research.

1.2 Academia and the Hitchhiker - A Literature Review

As has been noted in several academic texts on the subject of hitchhiking, there is a distinct lack of known facts about the issue. Although a potentially fascinating and fruitful area of research for many disciplines, it can be said that little has been written on it. This holds especially true for the 1990s, when hitchhiking’s decline was most acute - the hitchhiker became marginal both on the roadside and in academia. Paralleling the practice’s slow, small scale, but apparently steady resurgence in the past 15 years, a few new pieces of research have appeared, many of them student works by people who hitchhike

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58 Road Junky Travel Film Festival, May 2015, Berlin.
62 E.g. *agirlandherthumb.wordpress.com* [last accessed May 25th, 2016], youarealltourists.blogspot.com [last accessed May 25th, 2016], warmroads.de [last accessed May 25th, 2016].
63 In this text, however, these sources have not been analyzed specifically, but rather served to more broadly contextualize the ethnographic material forming the basis of this study.
themselves. The practice has in the past found academic recognition in the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, geography, psychology, history, communication studies, linguistics, semiotics, and criminology. Regrettably, the academic cross-awareness of many of the works created in the last century is woefully inadequate, even while taking into consideration the vastly improved search methods available today. Although appearing to be under-researched, the hitchhiker is no stranger to anthropology. The practice has made an early appearance in a guidebook to ethnographic methods\(^{65}\), and has since resurfaced time and time again, as a matter of discourse, a research mode, a frame of perception, a social practice, and as a theoretical vehicle. Most recently, hitchhiking has featured as an experimental foil in the interdisciplinary conference of the Design Research Society\(^{66}\).

Within German anthropology, only two texts have emerged which examine the practice explicitly. Kathrin Friedrich and Lysette Laffin\(^{67}\) have investigated the discursive strategies surrounding the practice historically and presently. They identified three distinct contemporary discourses that come to play when negotiating hitchhiking today: demonization, mystification, and recognition. In demonizing the practice, the ostensibly ‘obvious’ connection to risk and crime is put into focus, and the practice condemned as preposterously dangerous. Mystifying texts and media contrast the possibility of contemporary hitchhiking with its heyday in the 1960s, declaring that the cult status was lost, consequently the practice went extinct, and can now be considered part of a historical phase. The discourse of recognition is mainly produced by practitioners themselves and emphasizes the modern-day feasibility, enjoyability, and relative safety of the practice. Friedrich and Laffin further identified hitchhiking as a practice that facilitates distinction within the field of independent travel. Silvia Weißengruber\(^{68}\) has explored the points of resemblance between hitchhiking and the methodological tools available for empirical cultural research. She reflects on the insights into the perambulated territory and its people made possible by this specific mode of travel and research. Her observations on the execution of the practice itself are auto-ethnographic in nature. Another anthropological text that draws heavily from auto-ethnography is that of Patrick Laviolette. He inquires into hitchhiking as pertaining to the experience and perception of landscapes.


\(^{67}\) See FRIEDRICH; LAFFIN 2009.

spaces, and places and their poetic and political implications. This is linked to British cultural narratives of the practice. Hitchhiking as a specific mode of perception has been addressed in the work of the Australian historian Alice Garner as well. She has discussed hitchhikers’ negotiation of their perception of risk, and the specific relation to time that this mode of travel necessitates. Her assessments were based on auto-biographical literary sources. The first person to ever examine the practice academically was also a historian, John Schlebecker, at a point when the custom had already prevailed for half a century. He gives a concise history of the practice’s vacillating popularity and public perception, of its varying practitioners and their respective aims, and of the images of adventure and danger associated with it. The first extensive qualitative study of the phenomenon was undertaken by Mario Rinvolucri and self-published in 1974. It focuses on the history of the practice in Great Britain and casts it as a vital part of his young research participants’ coming of age and detachment from their parental home through the freedom and independence gained by hitchhiking. The practice is reportedly then given up upon establishment of an own family, and/or the acquisition of a car. Hitchhiking features as a rite of passage in Rinvolucri’s text, and this aspect of the practice will also be examined here. Among other things, what motivates people to hitchhike has also been negotiated in geography’s contributions to hitchhiking literature. In their quasi-ethnographic geographical project work, Ursula Trescher and Hermann König chronicle their own journey and encounters with other hitchhikers. They conclude that frequent long-distance hitchers’ motivations are more varied than short-distance or infrequent hitchers’, and include more idealistic and experience-oriented incentives. This renders the journey itself the reward, and not just a means to an end. The French geographer Sylvain Viard comes to a similar conclusion in his geographical study of spatial dimension and trajectory.

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72 See Schlebecker 1958.
Hitchhiking has been the topic of a few bachelor theses in the past few years. One of them has declared the practice dead in the USA, and investigates the reasons for its alleged demise. Christine Kath has examined hitchhiking as a social practice situated between individual tourism and lifestyle, but limited her approach to long-distance hitchhikers in Germany in her small-scale sociological study. Marie Rodenwald’s anthropological bachelor thesis inquired into conceptions of safety and risk pertaining to female hitchhikers, and considered the communication strategies used by women. These strategies have likewise been structurally analyzed by the linguist and semanticist Dagmar Schmauks, who has also examined the non-verbal communication preceding a ride. Another, earlier scholar of hitchhikers’ communication is Chandra Mukerji, who has illuminated the narrative forms employed by hitchhikers when telling each other tales of the road, and the special significance of ‘bullshitting’. Spinning a yarn, or telling a tall tale of spectacular if not entirely true episodes of difficulty and frustration enables hitchers to positively utilize these experiences of adversity. Problems faced while on the road thusly become the basis for heroic autobiographical stories of overcoming. This serves both for entertainment and sociability and for the production of a positive self-image. While the mental mechanisms of the hitchhiker would be an interesting area of research, studies in psychology have examined hitchhiking mainly as a phenomenon on which to exemplify human behaviors in social experiments. They have measured the effects of sex, attire, smiling, visible dependency, number of hitchers, and other

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77 I doubt it, and have hitchhiked in the USA myself. See www.hitchwiki.org/en/United_States_of_America [last accessed July 10th, 2016].
87 See CLIFFORD, Margaret; CLEARY, Paul: The Odds in Hitchhiking. Research paper. Iowa/Wisconsin 1971.
variables on the likelihood of hitchhikers being picked up. Little of value to this thesis can be derived from these studies, as they hardly add to our knowledge of the nature of hitchhikers. Stephen Franzoi, however, did expand this knowledge in his study of long-distance hitchhikers’ personality characteristics. Comparing them to their non-hitching contemporaries, he found hitchhikers to have a particular disposition towards intuition and feeling, a firm reliance on their own perception of their environment, an inclination to an impulsive and autonomous personality, a high tolerance of complexity and change, and a noteworthy appreciation of and desire for personal relationships.

The two criminological studies on hitchhiking are the only ones to have quantified the phenomenon, albeit only for a short time period and specific location. Both were commissioned in regard to hitchhiking’s public perception as being disproportionately linked to crime, and both were executed by law enforcement agencies. While the 1974 Californian study had a smaller scale, the more robust 1989 German study came to the same conclusion: that there is in fact no heightened risk of falling victim to crime as driver or hitchhiker, than there is in other, everyday activities not suspected of imminent hazard. Public risk perception is also at the center of the research done by Graeme Chesters and David Smith, who have explored the applicability of recent social theories concerning risk and trust to hitchhiking. From this, they developed possibilities of implementation of the practice in institutionalized form as suggestions for policy makers looking to cultivate sustainable modes of transport or to re-vitalize civil society. Another rather theoretical approach to hitchhiking was presented by Jonathan Purkis, who has examined hitchhiking as a foil on which to reconsider sociological and anthropological theories from an anarchist perspective. He sees the hitchhiker as the bearer of an illuminating social position from which collective and communal cohesion outside of established structures become visible. This elucidates the effective operation of helpfulness and non-monetary cooperation in informal situations and among actors separated by hierarchies and power imbalances. This is the only work linking hitchhiking to anarchism, a connection which will become significant also in this thesis. The unruliness of hitchhiking, its subversive and insurgent potential also feature in Michael O’Regan’s work. He is presently one of the most insightful scholars of hitchhiking and alternative independent

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91 See CHESTERS; SMITH 2001.
travel, both in terms of ethnographic publication\textsuperscript{93} and methodological reflection\textsuperscript{94}. His focus is on the many ways in which travelers creatively and tactically enact their mobilities, appropriate traveler- and motorscapes, create experiential forms of social connectivity, and negotiate space through performative practices that refute convention and habit, thus resisting the dominant order in their worlds. He is the only scholar to have discussed hitchgatherings, albeit marginally. In its topicality and depth, O’Regan’s work is particularly significant to this study. It can be maintained that much of the previous knowledge on the topic is fragmentary, incomplete, and/or outdated. In this thesis, an effort is made to validate, question, and extend some of this knowledge.

1.3 Journeys, Encounters, Visitations

In order to obtain insight into the practice, a number of journeys had to be undertaken, as research from home clearly would not do. Four events where hitchhikers gather were chosen as entry points into the field network\textsuperscript{95}. Each expedition was a combined inquiry with separate parts, on the road and in situ, each serving to answer different questions. The journey towards the event, as well as that back home, was chronicled as auto-ethnographic material. This procedure ensured on the one hand the collection of a wealth of ethnographic data and a full immersion into a hitchhiker’s mindset, on the other hand avoided an immediate disqualification in the eyes of my research subjects, for whom an arrival via hitchhiking appears to be the natural, the authentic, and frankly the only way. Each of the visited events had a different character and thus allowed me to witness a range of activities related to the community of hitchhikers and other travelers. The subsequent paragraphs will outline the qualities of each event and the role they played for this research.

1.3.1 German Hitchhiking Championship

In a first attempt to close in on an understanding of competitive hitchhiking, I participated in the German hitchhiking championship organized by \textit{Abgefahren e.V.}, which took the participants from Cottbus to the small Polish seaside town of Pogorzelica, a total distance of 340 to 400km, depending on the route. The race itself is devised as a one day race and has been taking place in this form annually since 2008. Each race starts in a

\textsuperscript{93} See O’Regan 2012. pp. 128-142.
ws1wk1wkqsk36zm6ocme81.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/files/2013/05/eRTR_SI_V10i5_6_Independent-Travel_Creative-Tactics-in-the-Margins_April2013_38-49.pdf [last accessed 2nd May, 2016].


German city and ends in a neighboring country. The event was initiated with a casual meet-and-greet of the 56 participants at the site of the starting point and free campground for the night, a public river pool. During the evening a local political collective, Zelle 79, supplied drinks, vegan food, anarchistic information material and music. The evening was used to find a team partner by those not yet paired off, as participation in the race is based on two-person teams. I teamed up with a young woman with whom I would travel to Pogorzela and back to Hamburg. The following morning, each team received a small starter kit containing a map of the destination area, emergency information and rules of the race, adhesive stickers, and team number signs to attach to backpack or hitchhiker. After having taken a group photo for the local press, the previously secret destination of the race was announced. After a short moment of inspecting their maps, the teams hurried out onto the streets and began hitchhiking. My team partner and I, somewhat overestimating our luck and skills, decided on a route that did not promise maximum speed, but a more local experience of the Polish landscape. This decision proved disastrous, and we had to spend the night with another team who had chosen that same ill-fated route, camping beside a highway access road. When by the next afternoon we finally arrived at the destination, several people had already left, and the award ceremony (such as it was) was over. We had made the last place, 26th team to arrive. Until the next morning, we remained at the seaside campground. The race participants spent their time swimming, walking in the little town, and later building a fire on the beach. In this holiday setting, I was able to observe behaviors and participate in several casual discussions, but unable to record any interviews for lack of time spent with any individual.

1.3.2 BreakOut Charity Race

The second research journey took place shortly after, when I participated in the BreakOut charity race starting from Munich. Conceptualized entirely different from the first race, this event required its participants to register as a team, pay a small fee, create an internet presence for the team on their website, and enlist sponsors, either private or corporate. While not expressly a hitchhiking race, the goal of BreakOut is to put as much distance between oneself and Munich in the span of 36 hours without spending money on transportation, making it essentially a hitchhiking race. The progress of each team is monitored via an elaborate mobile phone app, enabling teams to post their location, photos and updates, and see those of other teams. After 36 hours, the linear distance between the team’s latest GPS position and the starting point in Munich is measured, and the sponsors are asked to donate their pledged euro-cent-per-kilometer con-
tribution to an organization chosen by the event coordinators, in this case the DAFI higher education scholarship program of the UNHCR. Through the mediation of the event organizers, I was able to find a teammate from Munich. We both recruited sponsors privately, and first met on the eve of the race. He was a young man with hardly any previous experience in hitchhiking. In the morning at the starting point of the race in front of the university, I was able to observe the last preparations and the distribution of travel kits, of which each team received one. They included some food, DAFI information material and donation slips, as well as practical items such as sunscreen and marker pens. Each participant received an orange t-shirt with the BreakOut logo and slogan (“How far can you go?”) on the chest, as well as the UNHCR logo on the sleeve. These proved useful in establishing trust with potential drivers, giving each team a legitimate appeal. It appears that nearly all participants were students enrolled in the University of Munich, and that slightly more men than women participated. The beginning of the race was meticulously staged and recorded via camera drone. Some made for the central station hoping (rightfully) for free rides on trains, a kind of hitchhiking only made possible by the charity context of the race. Most however went for the roads, as did we. We had chosen the direction north. Along the way, we had several challenges to complete as part of the sponsorship, each valued a specified monetary amount. After leaving Munich, we only met another team on the road once. We spent a short night sleeping in a 24 hour highway restaurant, then continued on our way. In the end, the expiry of the 36 hours coincided exactly with the moment we ran out of land to travel further north on, when we reached the very end of Denmark, the place where Baltic and North Sea meet. Finally, our linear distance from Munich was measured to be 1069km, winning us 16th place, and generating 980€ in donations (of a total of 69.000€). We spent the night camping in the dunes, and then separated the next day. While again I had found no opportunity to conduct interviews, the experience proved fruitful nonetheless as I was able to document the implications of taking an apprentice under my wing as the more experienced hitchhiker, as well as record the noticeable difference between hitchhiking within a visibly charitable and organized context and without.

1.3.3 Nomads’ Gathering, Amsterdam

The third hitchhiking related event visited was again quite different from the previous experiences. It was the Nomads’ Gathering in Amsterdam, which is in fact not exclusively for or by hitchhikers, but more broadly related to long-term, low-budget, alternative, sustainable, independent and/or adventurous travel and lifestyle. The event took place in this form for the first time, but will find a sequel in 2016. I travelled to Amsterdam a
day prior to the two-day event, which is organized by volunteers and has no budget at all. The gathering, or rather conference, took place in a legalized squat in a bunker below a bridge in Vondelpark. The activist art collective *Schijnheilig* had provided the space for the gathering. The event consisted of a number of workshops, presentations, lectures, discussions, concerts and activities within and in front of the bunker. All speakers and presenters were volunteers, as were the sign language interpreters present for a group of deaf-mute participants. In total, the gathering attracted some 150 people of roughly even gender distribution, the vast majority of which were currently travelling, and under 30 years of age. On the first day, I participated in the workshop ‘Hitchhiking’, which was attended by about 45 people. It was moderated by three accomplished hitchhikers who told the audience about their own experiences, answered questions and discussed among themselves. The evening was filled with several concerts, and the food collected during the day was cooked as vegan meals for all. The next day started with the workshop ‘Female Solo Travel’, which was open to women only and again was moderated by three experts on the matter, and again attended by ca. 40. Discussions varied from the practical to the political, and generally revolved around the creation of safety on the road. In the evening, three movies revolving around nomadic living, activism and independent adventure travel were shown and discussed. The gathering ended with a party in a different location, an underground bar in a previously squatted neighborhood that had just recently been cleared by police. This visit enabled me to take note of how hitchhiking is negotiated in the context of alternative travels in general, what values are ascribed to the practice and how it allows travelers to claim attributes valued by the nomadic travelers and associated with hitchhiking. Unfortunately, what dominates the researcher’s memory of the nomads’ gathering is a somewhat crippling social anxiety, prohibiting the recording of interviews as well as most casual conversation. This seemed especially frustrating in a setting where contact among the gathered travelers was so easily achieved, as a prevailing sense of recognition allowed for an acquaintance to be established by a simple: “Hi, where are you from?”

### 1.3.4 Annual European Hitchgathering, St.-Laurent-du-Pape

The fourth journey undertaken in the course of this research was the most successful in terms of data generated, and the most enlightening concerning the community aspect of hitchhiking. For these reasons, much of the focus of this work will lie on this meeting, while the other visited events have shed light on other specific aspects and serve to

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contextualize hitchhiking in a broader perspective. The event visited was the Annual European Hitchgathering, which has been taking place each August since 2008 in different locations throughout Europe, and attracts hitchhikers from all European countries. The goal of the hitchgathering is to promote hitchhiking, unite the community, and share skills and knowledge. The basic structure of the hitchgathering is simple: Each year, a location is sought out that meets the minimum criteria of offering free camping space, a water source and a source of food, preferably but not necessarily available for free through dumpster diving. Also, the space has to be non-restrictive to nudity and allow for fire making, music playing and alcohol consumption. The rest of the arrangements depends on the people voluntarily organizing the gathering, and those attending it. Hence, each year the gatherings can be quite different from each other. Each event is preceded by several smaller pre-gatherings across Europe in the days leading up to the main gathering, and may be followed by post-gatherings as people disperse. I spent two days hitchhiking to the gathering site in St.-Laurent-du-Pape, southern France, where I remained for six days. The land belongs to a self-managed, nonprofit agricultural collective called Caracoles. On the hitchgathering site, a pleasant, wooded piece of land between an apple orchard and a small river, I found what was generally lauded as the best infrastructure the hitchgathering ever had. Amenities included the aforementioned river, which was used for bathing and all washing and cleaning needs (although the use of detergents was prohibited), a tank of drinking water, a generous fireplace built on the first day, a gas stove with several large pots and pans (albeit most cooking was done on the open fire), a sizeable refrigerator, several electrical outlets, some tarpaulins suspended from the trees for shade, hammocks brought by the participants, ‘shit pits’ dug in the forest, and a spacious white pavilion tent that served as the hitchgathering headquarters. In it, a large storage rack held the communal foods acquired each day through dumpster diving excursions (sorted unlabeled, ‘non-vegan’ and ‘non-vegetarian’). The tent’s walls were plastered with organizational charts for coordinating the dumpster diving missions, workshop announcement lists everybody was free to add to, a poster to leave one’s mark on, and a map of the site indicating which parts are off limits and which can be freely used. Along the walls a library of anarchist and feminist zines was strung up on a clothes line. On the floor sat a carton labeled “lightfoot letter box” where travelers could deposit letters to other travelers, which would then be taken on the road.

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97 Previous locations: France, Ukraine, Portugal, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Slovakia, Albania.
98 But not exclusively: there were also Russians, Indians, Americans, Australians, and others.
99 ‘Reclaiming food’, ‘dumpster diving’, ‘skipping’: practices of finding discarded, edible food by searching through supermarket trash containers, or asking for leftovers and unsold food from restaurants, markets, bakeries, and storehouses.
by another hitchhiker, perhaps passed along and finally delivered upon (possibly quite delayed) encounter. The daily general assembly and several workshops took place in the tent. Participants were free to camp anywhere on the site and spend their time ad libitum. Activities included numerous workshops and ‘skillshares’ (largely consisting of discussion circles), river bathing, dumpster diving expeditions, music making (with flutes, guitars and percussion instruments), singing, excursions into the surrounding region, talking, handicrafts, reading, writing, drawing, filming, playing games and general merrymaking among friends. The hitchgathering is an experiment in non-hierarchical community and has no appointed leaders and very few rules, which pertain to the upkeep of the land. Everyone is free to do as they please without harming others. However, there were some charismatic leaders, who would most likely deny the accusation of being one. And, as anthropology knows, even in the absence of a written statute there is no such thing as ‘no rules’ in a community of social beings. Hitchgatherings generally last several weeks, with people arriving before the set date and remaining after most have left, the core week seeing the most attendees. During my six-day stay on the site, some people appeared late while others left early, but in total I have seen an estimated 160 participants, including three dogs. The distribution of genders appeared to be mostly balanced, although at some point there were more women present than men. While a large percentage of attendees were currently or permanently nomadic, others were students, employees or freelancers on holiday. Apart from attending workshops, participant observation and informal conversation, I was finally able to conduct 15 interviews with hitchgathering attendants, as the slow-paced setting allowed for acquaintances to be established without haste. I left on the sixth day in the company of a hitch partner who accompanied me half of the way and needed two days total for my return.

1.4 Research Objective

In order to render the research process preceding this text as transparent as possible, it must be disclosed that the author went into the field not with a specific research question in mind, but rather with many. In an effort to adequately experience, document, and describe the fullness and complexity of the topic, the field was approached very openly and with no specific goal. In this way, initially no detail was discarded as irrelevant. The inquiry at hand was shaped by the restrictions and possibilities that each field site offered. While the first three journeys opened up the perspective of how hitchhiking is done practically and competitively, linked to charity causes, and discussed in a wider

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community of alternative travelers, the short-lived encounters didn’t lend themselves to in-depth discussions, prolonged participant observation, or interviews. These were finally achieved at the hitchgathering. As research progressed, several themes and recurring narratives emerged, drawing the researcher’s attention. To render the materials gathered legible, cuts had to be made, and emerging patterns made explicit. The research aspects of knowledge and community came into focus, as they were frequent topics of discussion and narration, and they shape both the practice and the experience of hitchhiking, as well as the relationships between practitioners. Hitchhikers form a community of practice, and the interpersonal engagements of its members are based upon a common knowledge. Unless otherwise specified, I speak of ‘hitchhikers’ as those who regularly engage in the practice, are aware of the hitchhiking community and consider themselves part of that community. I cannot speak of those who hitchhike in other contexts. The questions this thesis aims to answer are the following:

*What knowledge and skills pertaining to successful hitchhiking are shared among experienced hitchhikers and considered to be standard knowledge?*

*How and why does one become a hitchhiker?*

These major questions entail a number of more specific sub-questions to be answered. Among these, the following are particularly conspicuous: What values, views and behaviors does membership in the community of hitchhikers entail? How do hitchhikers characterize themselves as individuals, and members of the community in general? How is hitchhiking linked to lifestyle change, and how does this process affect an individual’s identity and self-image? How are individual and group identities produced and enacted?

Before illustrating the methods used to find answers to these questions, some key notions and theories that will be used in this thesis are clarified and situated within anthropology.

### 1.5 Theoretical Framework - Knowledge and Community

The two most central concepts of this thesis are those of ‘community’ and ‘knowledge’, the interrelation of which will be reviewed. Beforehand, it will be briefly delineated what I mean when I speak of ‘lifestyle’, ‘identity’, and the ‘alternative’.

While society and its structures and cultural orientations have long been described mainly in terms of classes or strata defined by income, education, or profession, more modern approaches are oriented around cultural practice. In these perspectives, lifestyles, milieus and scenes take on central roles. While the concept of ‘lifestyle’ has its beginnings in the writings of Max Weber and Georg Simmel, who first introduced peo-
ple’s conduct of life as a category of inquiry, it was Pierre Bourdieu\textsuperscript{101} who developed it fully. Based on empirical research, he theorized several key concepts, such as social\textsuperscript{102} and cultural\textsuperscript{103} capital, and the habitus\textsuperscript{104}, stressing how dispositions are embodied. A lifestyle in this sense is an expression of a conglomerate of value systems, preferences, fundamental beliefs and behavioral patterns that have been learnt during earliest socialization, habitualized, and are constantly reviewed and reinforced in everyday interactions. Lifestyle is an expression of underlying orientations and dispositions, and each type prescribes patterns of everyday behavior that extend into all areas of life, from social relations, sexual behavior and views on politics and religion to leisure, travel, and mobility. Lifestyles are developed in accordance with the norms and values of specific socio-cultural milieus. They exhibit a degree of biographical stability, but are not invariant, and can be identified and recognized by others. Persons sharing a lifestyle interact and conduct social relations at above-average ratios. The milieu was first introduced into academia by Émile Durkheim, but has since evolved conceptually and remains somewhat imprecise. It is generally defined by a common lifestyle of a social environment and a high degree of in-group interaction. Other defining aspects can be internalized norms, a sense of solidarity, collective mental representations of social forces, and a common political goal.

‘Identity’, far from being a static and definite entity, should be understood as determined in its situative and social manifestations. Erving Goffman described identity as a threefold construct consisting of personal, social, and ego identity. While personal identity is shaped by an individual’s ascribed biography and distinguishing features, social identity consists of the individual’s repertoire of roles, the expectations of correspondent behaviors, and social distinguishing features. Both types are constructed by and through others. It is the ego identity in which a person’s reflexive subjectivity and the sensation of continuity and peculiarity of one’s own comes to bear, and which is the result of one’s accumulated experiences. Thus, identity is to Goffman less of a substance or property, and more of a processual and interactive emergence of mutually influenced

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\textsuperscript{102} Social capital is the entirety of actual and potential resources that are linked to the possession of an enduring network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual knowing and acknowledgement. They are resources that are based on group affiliation. See \textsc{Bourdieu}, Pierre: \textit{Ökonomisches Kapital, kulturelles Kapital, soziales Kapital}. In: Kreckel, Reinhard (Ed.): \textit{Soziale Ungleichheiten}. Göttingen 1983. pp. 190f.

\textsuperscript{103} Cultural capital exists in three forms: incorporated, in the form of enduring dispositions of the organism; objectivated, in the form of cultural commodities, e.g. books, paintings, instruments, or machines in which theories, criticisms etc. have been reified; and institutionalized, as in the form of academic titles. See \textsc{Bourdieu}, Pierre: \textit{Die verborgenen Mechanismen der Macht}. Hamburg 1992. p. 185.

\textsuperscript{104} The habitus appears in the form of enduring patterns of perception, thought, and actions; it is socially and historically determined and based on individual and collective experiences. See \textsc{Bourdieu}, Pierre: \textit{Sozialer Sinn. Kritik der theoretischen Vernunft}. Frankfurt a.M. 1987. p. 101.
becoming. In this way, identity is not something one ‘has’ or ‘is’, but an activity, something one ‘does’, a performance that is shaped by the acting persons and is formed in the interplay of interpersonal and social relationships. 105

Certain lifestyles and milieus are commonly referred to as ‘alternative’. While there exists no concise definition of the term, it can be contextualized as follows. First of all, ‘alternative’ is used for non-majority lifestyles, identities, and practices. It is positively connoted in the sense of a claim to self-actualization and the ideals of communal solidarity, naturalness, holism and sustainability. 106 Alternative tourism arose in response to the growing touristic accessibility and exploitation of the globe, and can mean many things: e.g. backpacking, bicycling, hospitality exchange, or hitchhiking, depending on the dominant travel reference one travels ‘alternative to’. It is often in the form of ‘slow’ mobilities and practices. The act of travel thus serves to distinguish and localize oneself as an individual or group on the spectrum of travel options, and is normatively charged. Alternative tourism is marked by a combination of focus on pleasure and experience, economical consideration, and political ambition. Such ‘travelers’ see themselves in opposition to ‘tourists’ consuming tailored vacations and prefer producing the conditions of their journeys on their own terms. Thus, travel emerges as a provider of milieu-specific experiences and as a field of identity-generating distinction in which unconventional individualists can experience their claim to differentiation from mass culture. 107

‘Knowledge’ is defined on the one hand as a stock of facts, theories, and rules, on the other hand as ‘true’ facts that are legitimate opinions of individuals and groups, justified by broad consensus. Circumstances, connections and matters of supposed fact are thusly accepted, generally assumed to be true and so validated as knowledge. 108 In anthropology, knowledge always has a collective dimension and is bound to actors and their bodies, who in turn are connected through a common practice. The interest lies in shared knowledge, its implementation in practice, its production, dispersion, and disputation. Knowledge isn’t limited to the cognitive, but takes form as situational, corporeal, and embodied knowledge. Anthropology is less concerned with whether or not knowledge is in fact ‘true’, as its legitimacy prompts people to act on it and thus makes

it true in its consequences in this world. What is more crucial is how actors can establish a claim to truth and thus derive the capacity and power to define and to act.\textsuperscript{109} Knowledge is one of the constituents of social order, and is used by actors to define social relationships, and to endow, impugn, or help overthrow order.\textsuperscript{110} ‘Community’, like ‘culture’, ‘ritual’, or ‘symbol’, is a word regularly used in everyday speech and apparently readily intelligible. In the discourse of social science, however, it is highly contentious, as each definition seems to entail or imply a theory.\textsuperscript{111} Taking a step back, two suggestions appear to be made by the word’s common usage:

"that the members of a group of people (a) have something in common with each other, which (b) distinguishes them in a significant way from the members of other putative groups. ‘Community’ thus seems to imply simultaneously both similarity and difference."\textsuperscript{112}

Lave’s and Wenger’s concept of the community of practice\textsuperscript{113} was originally intended to describe learning and integration processes in the workplace, particularly in skilled crafts and trades, but it lends itself to be transferred to a number of communities based on a common field of competence. The concept has been further developed into a managerialist conception used in corporate knowledge management and organizational development, has many applications in education, and has been made productive in anthropology. Its epistemological value lies in its ability to describe the social processes involved in finding, sharing, transferring, and archiving knowledge, explicit or tacit in the form of expertise, and the generation of social capital these processes entail. The theory complex is hardly coherent, and is constantly evolving and being adapted to different scopes of application. Here, the basic assumptions will be delineated.

Communities of practice are defined by their domain, their community, and their practice. The domain is the area of interest, and members of the community show commitment to this joint enterprise and the shared expertise thereof, which shapes their identity as midwife, tailor, or in this case, hitchhiker. This shared understanding of what ties the community together is established through sustained interactions between members, and continually renegotiated. The community is upheld by the joint activities and discussions in pursuit of the domain, by the establishment of norms, by the collaborative relationships of its members, and their mutual learning and engagement. These rela-


\textsuperscript{111} See Cohen 1995. p.11.

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid. p. 12.

tionships bind the community together as a social entity. The community's practice is shaped by a shared repertoire of communal resources ranging from experiences and stories to tools and methods of addressing recurring problems. This repertoire is produced through practice and utilized in pursuit of the joint enterprise. Maintaining the community and its practice takes time, engagement, and sustained interaction.\textsuperscript{114}

In conceptualizing the community of practice, Lave and Wenger distanced themselves from an understanding of learning as an isolated process of near-mechanical transmission of a pre-defined body of explicit knowledge from teacher to pupil. Instead, they conceive of learning as a social process which involves a deepening immersion into a community through everyday participation, which they termed \textit{situated learning}. This approach "takes as its focus the relationship between learning and the social situation in which it occurs".\textsuperscript{115} The people who form a community of practice are engaged in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor:

"As we define these enterprises and engage in their pursuit together, we interact with each other and with the world and we tune our relations with each other and with the world accordingly. In other words we learn. Over time, this collective learning results in practices that reflect both the pursuit of our enterprises and the attendant social relations."

The concept of \textit{legitimate peripheral participation} describes the process of a novice's incrementally rising engagement in a community of practice, taking on more complex and responsible tasks as learning and social immersion progress and acquaintance with the projects, vocabulary, and organizing principles of the community is established. Lave and Wenger described the positions that an individual can occupy in a community of practice in terms of centrality: there are peripheral, marginal, and central positions. Peripheral positions are occupied by newcomers who participate in the community's tasks to a limited extent, based on their limited expertise. Central positions are afforded to old timers, full participants who have achieved mastery. Marginal positions are occupied by those who, by choice or by license, keep to or are kept at the periphery.\textsuperscript{117} Individuals occupy different roles in the different communities they belong to. It is through the mastery of knowledge and skill that a novice moves towards full participation, if desired and achievable, in the socio-cultural practices of a community. Newcomers become full members and old timers through a social process in which the learning of

\textsuperscript{114} See \textsc{Wenger}, Etienne: Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity. Cambridge 1998. pp. 73-83.


\textsuperscript{116} \textsc{Wenger} 1998. p. 45.

\textsuperscript{117} See Ibid. pp. 165-172.
knowledgeable skills is configured through the learning of community identity. This includes learning to speak, act, and improvise in ways which make sense to the community. Here, learning far transcends the internalization of information, and concerns “the whole person acting in the world”. Individual learning is thought of as “emergent, involving opportunities to participate in the practices of the community as well as the development of an identity which provides a sense of belonging and commitment.” Participation is thus not simply a localized and temporary engagement in certain activities, but a more encompassing process that involves the construction of identities in relation to the community. Organizing around a particular area of knowledge and activity gives members a sense of joint enterprise, belonging, and identity. Communities of practice thus generate social capital for their members. Some communities of practice are formalized, have a name and defined members, others are fluid and informal, as is the case in the community of hitchhikers. Lave and Wenger have exemplified their theories on the communities of practice of Yucatán midwives, Gola tailors, US Navy quartermasters, butchers, non-drinking alcoholics in Alcoholics Anonymous, and insurance claims processors.

Irrespective of whether or not people who hitchhike ever seek out others, establish personal relationships and become part of the community of practice, they may nevertheless perceive themselves to be members of the imagined community of hitchhikers. Imagined communities are not and cannot be based on everyday face-to-face interactions among their members, as there are simply too many of them to ever know, meet, or even hear of most fellow-members. “[Y]et in the minds of each lives the image of their communion”. It is thus socially constructed and imagined by those who perceive themselves to be members. The nation is the prime example of an imagined community.

2. Research into Hitchhiking - A Methodology

Hitchhikers are dispersed in time and space, making the task of studying them a particularly challenging one. In this part it will be elaborated how a combination of multiple

118 See Lave; Wenger 1991. p. 29.
119 See Lave; Wenger 1991. p. 49.
122 See Lave; Wenger 1991.
123 See Wenger 1998.
125 Ibid. p. 7.
methods has been utilized to grasp the ephemeral phenomenon and to come closer to the essence of what it means to be a hitchhiker.

2.1 Roads, Spaces, Places - the Field

For quite a while now in cultural anthropology, the field has not been what it used to be. Long gone are the days of conceiving of the field as a singularly bounded geographical entity, entirely discrete and with no ties connecting it to the world beyond, outside the village (as it so often was the case, one village equaling the field). Still, from the moment of parting from this conception it was still a long way to go to the many ways in which we now describe the field.

George Marcus has suggested that the local and the global are inseparably linked, and that in order to recognize the multiple logics, a researcher needs to follow all connections, associations and relationships between the dimensions, be they geographical, virtual, symbolic or social. While this ideal has its limits of feasibility, the ethnography endeavored here is certainly multi-sited: a mobile fieldwork pursuing the research mode of follow the people. These are literally moving targets: “Sie halten nicht still, bleiben nicht am angestammten Platz, und wer sie ins Visier nehmen möchte, muß selbst mobil werden.” The research mode exerted here has been described as a „movement-driven research methodology sensitive to those on the move, where ‘being there’, means thinking, feeling and performing their world.”

The field researched in this inquiry can be divided into two categories: the stationary and the mobile. The people who are the focus of this study, and their community, are gathered around a practice of mobility, but their congregations take place in stationary, physical spaces. To understand their practice, an engagement with a mobile field is necessary. To understand their community, a stationary, albeit temporary field must be sought out. These stationary fields are defined in time and space, and must be so in order to allow the members of this unlimitedly dispersed community to meet in any number. They are in fact not unlike an ephemeral village, a camp of tents which is either the outright meeting point for a gathering, or the destination of a race. The mobile field, which is the foundation of and raison d’être for the stationary one, has no geographical boundaries, as any road can become part of it by the simple act of extending one’s

126 See BURRELL 2009. p. 182.
thumb. It consists of motorscapes, their inhabitants, amenities and machineries: the roads, their boundaries, surrounding sceneries, drivers who interact with, ignore, or give lifts to hitchers, service, gas, and toll stations, cars and trucks. It encompasses public, private and semi-private spaces, non-places\textsuperscript{130}, geographical locations and finally virtual spaces, as the gatherings would be impossible without them.

\section*{2.2 Researcher's Position}

As is always the case in ethnography, the researcher is faced with the task of situating her- or himself in the field in a manner which will be neither too distanced nor too intimate. The risk of the former being that of remaining eternally an outsider, taking notes from afar on a phenomenon never genuinely understood for lack of initiation by the true experts on the matter: the persons involved. The risk of the latter being that of abolishing all critical and analytical distance to the field, becoming one with the community to be researched, \textit{going native} and thus losing one’s ability to describe in any objective way the phenomena in question.\textsuperscript{131}

Hitchhiking is, however, an area of investigation that requires a good deal of corporeal, physical, emotional, mental, and social engagement in order to have any chance of getting close to the lived experience and social world of its practitioners. Hitchhiking can never be done in a detached way. It requires a person’s full attention and lays claims on all their faculties and abilities. Thus, a qualitative inquiry into the practice can only reasonably be done by persons who are themselves significantly immersed in it - the researcher’s body is their most significant instrument. Corporeal engagement includes being read: “what our body looks like, how it is perceived and used can impact upon access, field roles and field relationships.”\textsuperscript{132} The auto-ethnographic practice of \textit{authentification}\textsuperscript{133} understands the researcher’s own corporeal experience as mirroring that of others, and produces materials which are intrinsically linked to that experience. The permeability, interconnectedness and vulnerability of bodies are at the center of this method, which gives access to the “lived experiences which incorporate but trans-

\textsuperscript{130} A non-place is a physical space that lacks identity, history, and relation. It is often a mono-functional space of transit, not made for dwelling and offering very limited possibility of experience. The non-place is the opposite of an anthropological place. Examples are shopping malls, airports, highways, and highway amenity stations. See Augé, Marc: Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity. London/New York 1992.


I can speak most legitimately of the specific experience of white, western, educated, cis-gender, able-bodied, heterosexual women in their late twenties. I tried to keep in mind the power relations, social status and implications linked to these characteristics, and will make visible my role “as an active and embodied participant in the social relationships and situations” described here.

While my own engagement with the practice has by now lasted almost ten years, the community I encountered was entirely new to me. I had never previously sought out other hitchhikers, although certainly I knew they existed. The practice had hitherto been private to me, a challenge to my own boundaries, with only the basic knowledge on the topic derived from internet resources, otherwise learning by doing. I collected experiences in Europe, Polynesia, and North America, but most of my journeys were humble in scale and scope, adding up to a total of approximately 5000km. However, my own previous experiences of hitchhiking allowed me to situate myself in the community as somebody in the know, a person that is by no means a beginner. This enabled me to meet my potential research participants on eye level, empathize with their experiences, and be perceived as one of their own conducting a study, rather than an outside intruder. My previous inexperience with any form of hitchhikers’ gathering however permitted me to see these meetings from the perspective of an initial outsider with no knowledge of the spoken and unspoken social rules. It allowed me to experience the way a person new to the community, but recognized as a hitchhiker is welcomed into the collective. In terms of field access, this meant that my approach to the gathered crowd was largely unobstructed. But it also rendered visible the ways in which I in fact didn’t fit in, my own occasionally felt alienation from the hitchhikers serving as friction points illustrating the power of unwritten collective values and expectations, even, or perhaps especially in a community that so prizes individuality, expression, tolerance and all things alternative.

Although almost certainly part of any ethnographic endeavor, the anxieties going along with such a project are seldom made explicit. They did however play an important role in the course of this research and the issue should be addressed. This is, naturally, a personal account, and the situations described might have been experienced very differently by another ethnographer. However, being unable to shed my own peculiar disposition, I was occasionally afflicted by feelings of alienation. These contrasted starkly the cheerful and carefree atmosphere of the spaces visited, and the sense of acceptance and community integration others appeared to experience. I felt simultaneously drawn

135 Amit 2000. p. 3.
to and alienated from the group. This estrangement was caused by a number of factors, and appeared in moments when it became clear that I, while in a sense eligible for community membership, am accustomed to a lifestyle quite different from those on the road. This difference manifested itself around the themes food, money, and the body. A (moneyless) traveler cannot be a picky eater, but I am. My particular requirements regarding food are usually my own private concern, but during the camps they limited the ease with which I could participate in that most crucial ritual of community building, the sharing of food. Occasionally, I bought outside food during the camps, but was oddly secretive about this, as in my mind this purchase had to appear to hitchhikers as an unreasonable extravagance, given the abundance of communal food. While it would have never occurred to me to spend money on transport to and from the gatherings, I am in no way entirely opposed to spending, and this distinguished me from many of the travelers present. Another area of (possibly self-inflicted) alienation was my own body, especially during the hitchgathering, where nudity was prevalent. While I had some difficulty with the limited opportunities for personal hygiene, this hardly affected my relationships. However, I often felt that my body was marked by a lifestyle that put me visibly outside the spectrum of what long-term hitchhikers look like. It was my bodily markers of identity, my short, combed hair, my lack of tattoos, my (no longer) shaven body areas and my manicured nails that gave me away as somebody who didn’t quite belong. My body isn’t habituated to being employed in the ways characteristic to the hitchgathering, and so I experienced several peaks of physical discomfort, as illustrated in this excerpt from the field diary:

“[I am] more miserable than ever: hungry, hurting everywhere, especially the feet, burnt, hung-over, the sun is killing me, so tired of sitting on the ground all the time, being poked by sticks. The constant discomfort is gnawing on me, each poke a micro-aggression of a hostile environment.”

It must be emphasized that I never felt actively ostracized by the hitchhikers, but rather experienced these moments of alienation internally, and possibly they were of my own making. And while I knew that it was in no way necessary for this research to be completely integrated in the investigated community, more often than not I felt the need to demonstrate my belonging for fear of otherwise appearing as a spy, or positioning myself on the outside. While during the actual hitchhiking no problems arose concerning the disclosure of my research activities, my encounters during the races and gatherings were often anxiety-ridden. Some of the problems I experienced so vividly have been described by Rolf Lindner as attributable to the delicate relation between researcher

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136 Although none of these attributes were carried by me exclusively.
137 Field diary, August 7th, 2015. p. 223.
and researched that is marked by mutual observation and assignment of roles. What appears to be another cause of my anxiety is the difference in states of mind between my research subjects and myself. While I considered the entire duration of my stay at the hitchhikers’ camps to be work, to them it was the holidays. Simply put, I had two conflicting roles to fill: that of researcher conducting a study, and that of hitchhiker participating in an event. While in my mind my incessant note-taking already must have looked suspicious to the hitchhikers, each disclosure of my researcher status bore the concern of appearing to have been amiable to the person for the sole purpose of extracting research material from them. From the unease caused by the felt scriptedness of each approach to a new person to the perceived crudeness of selecting the ‘most valuable’ interview partners, my research experience was often overshadowed by a dread of either failing as an anthropologist, or failing as a fellow hitchhiker. Occasionally, and particularly in Amsterdam, I found myself trapped in a vicious circle of communication apprehension that originated in my researcher status and the time restrictions of the visited events. The attendant social anxieties and sensations of fraudulence prevented both casual conversation and interviews, causing feelings of failure and guilt, which again intensified the uneasiness with which I communicated with the people present. While I might have enjoyed visiting the events privately a great deal, the research context of my stay gave the experience an entirely different quality:

“Every moment, the thesis hovered above my head like the sword of Damocles, like a thunderous cloud, rumbling the imperative: Make something of this! Seize the moment! Observe! Note! Reflect! Befriend them! Talk! Ask! Conduct interviews! Conduct interviews!!!”

As each waking moment held the potential to be made useful for this thesis, it also held the potential for a failure to seize these opportunities. And even in participating, taking notes and communicating, a sinking feeling remained that I may be missing something important while my gaze is directed elsewhere.

2.3 Methodological Reflections

“Das Wagnis, ins Unbekannte vorzudringen, flexibles Denken und Wachsamkeit für den Augenblick; dies alles sind Charakteristika des Vagabundierens sowie wesentliche methodische Werkzeuge in den empirischen Kulturwissenschaften. KulturanthropologInnen sind praktisch immer »on the road«.”

140 „Venturing into the unknown, flexible thinking, and vigilance for the moment; all these are characteristics of vagabonding as well as essential methodical tools in the empirical cultural studies. Cultural anthropologists are practically always »on the road«.” Weibengruber 2012. p. 235.
The research carried out here was not only figuratively, but also literally on the road. The specific methods used in this mobile inquiry will be laid out and reflected upon here. Altogether, several classic ethnographic methods have been employed, adapted, and combined to form the basis of this work. This combined and multifaceted methodology was utilized in order to grasp “the ephemeral, the elusive, the indefinite, the subjective, and the irregular”\(^\text{141}\), which makes up a good part of the hitchhikers’ life worlds.

### 2.3.1 Participant Observation

“Spezifik der Feldforschung ist [...] ein perspektivenreicher, meist multimethodischer Zugang, der auf der aktiven, beobachtenden Teilnahme am alltäglichen Leben der Beforschten zum Ziel des sinnverstehenden Miterlebens und Nachvollziehens von Wirklichkeitszusammenhängen basiert.”\(^\text{142}\)

Being the classic and core method of cultural anthropology, participant observation is almost indispensible for any ethnographic work. It allows for immersed insight into the behaviors and actions of people, into their everyday practices and life worlds, and into the contexts and structures that shape them. In order to be able to fathom this emic perspective, the researcher has to employ their own persona as an instrument of investigation. In applying their body, sociability, personality and competence in social situations, the researcher gains information, but this condition creates a particular necessity of proceeding introspectively and reflexively.\(^\text{143}\) This means a constant scrutiny of one’s own assumptions, perceptions and sentiments.

Among other things, I observed the many leisure activities of the gathered hitchhikers, their interactions, and the way they dwell, fulfill their needs, appropriate space, and utilize their bodies. I witnessed informal group discussions and more focused ones in the form of several workshops. This allowed for the documentation of the configuration and performance of narrations, the dynamics of conversation, and the achievement of consensus or integration of objection. It also disclosed some information about the relations between the discussion participants. Furthermore, I traveled over 3000km in the company of one or more hitchpartners and was able to observe their practice, the techniques they applied, and their interactions with drivers and passersby.

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\(^{141}\) O’REGAN 2015. p. 457.

\(^{142}\) „The specific of fieldwork is [...] an approach that is rich in perspectives and mostly multi-methodic, based on an active, participant observation of the researched persons’ everyday life, to the goal of sharing experience in a way that apprehends meaning and comprehends interrelations of realities.” SCHMIDT-LAUBER 2007 b. p. 219.

2.3.2 Auto-Ethnography

“Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno).”¹⁴⁴

Auto-ethnography can grant insight into aspects that are not easily verbalized, such as everyday routines, embodied movements, sensuous intensities, affective dispositions, and the effects of fleeting encounters, and it encompasses both the extraordinary and the boringly unexceptional. All research on the practice of hitchhiking inevitably needs an auto-ethnographic element, as reliable data on a corporeal practice cannot be established by second-hand knowledge alone: “[M]ost cultural knowledge is stored in action rather than words.”¹⁴⁵ Of course, auto-ethnography as a sub-category of ethnography comes with its own challenges and limitations, as well as strengths and possibilities in the material it can potentially produce. It requires some measure of sensibility and reflexivity in order to avoid simply generalizing one’s own experiences.¹⁴⁶ Nonetheless, the method creates much material that is linked to the researcher’s personal, sometimes profoundly emotional involvement. There is a risk of confounding the felt significance of strongly emotional moments with their actual relevance to the researched field, and their inclusion into the final text may appear as egocentric navel-gazing, the author risking to compromise her- or himself.¹⁴⁷

The perspective I was able to generate auto-ethnographically is that of a person experienced in hitchhiking, but inexperienced in the meetings that attract hitchhikers. I was able to meticulously chronicle my own practice and experience of hitchhiking, as well as my integration into (and occasional estrangement from) the community. This way, I was able to take note of those aspects of the practice that are never spelled out or written down, because experienced and knowledgeable hitchhikers consider their verbal explanation redundant.

2.3.3 Narrative Interviews

“[Qualitative Interviews] zeigen Selbstverständnis, Alltagswissen und persönliche Vorstellungen von Individuen, die als Experten ihrer Lebenswelt wahrgenommen

¹⁴⁵ HASTRUP, Kirsten: A Passage to Anthropology: Between Experience and Theory. London 1995. p. 82.
The interview is one of anthropology’s most widely-used methods, and many variations of it have been developed, each geared toward a certain goal. This ranges from highly focused, over biographical to group and narrative interviews. The use of narrative interviews enables researchers to learn how their interview partners structure and evaluate their experiences, which aspects are emphasized or abandoned, how they position themselves towards the main theme, and what references are made to other topics. The interview serves as a stage for actors to create their own narration in a way that matches and supports the image they have of themselves, or want to project, at the present moment. It is not so much a source of objective truth but of an aspired self-image. We form narration and personal history in such a way that it ends in an acceptable manner for ourselves and ideally our social environment. In narrating our stories, we shape and interpret our past specifically towards our present within the guidelines of our thought and speech. Likewise, memories are delusive: it is not the mundane, the everyday, the ordinary and commonplace that engraves itself into our memories, but the extraordinary, the exceptional, the unique and uncommon that stands out as a discrete and singular recollection. Ordinary and repeated events instead accumulate and coalesce in out memory to an image of a ‘typical’ episode.

In this research, the narrative interview has been employed in order to establish hitchhikers’ biographies in relation to the practice and the community. As a stimulus to elicit a narration from interview partners, an open, biographical request was made: “Please tell me your hitchhiking story.” While this impulse was sufficient for some, others asked for more precise instructions, and were asked to talk about how they first got into hitchhiking, how their relationship to it might have changed, and what ultimately brought them to the hitchgathering. During the interview, the researcher’s role is ideally limited to that of an active listener sending nonverbal signals of attention. In reality,

151 See Ibid. p. 277.
152 See SPIROVA, Marketa: Narrative Interviews. In: BISCHOFF, Christine; OEHME-JÜNGLING, Karoline; LEIMGRUBER, Walter (Eds.): Methoden der Kulturanthropologie. Bern 2014. p. 120.
however, it wasn’t always possible for me to restrain myself in phases of prolonged silence. Nonetheless, the interview partners were either nonverbally or explicitly invited to express themselves in as few or many words as they saw fit. Occasionally, I asked for more information on the topics introduced by the interviewees, or asked specifically about other hitchhiking related events they attended. After my partners had talked about their experiences of and notions towards hitchhiking at their chosen length, another question was posed: “Do you think there may be common character traits among hitchhikers?” This elicited a number of different responses and forms the basis for the analysis of hitchhikers’ self and group images. Interview partners were selected firstly at random, people I already knew and had some relation to, which lowered the threshold of asking for an interview. Later, they were selected towards the goal of maximally diversifying perspective by requesting interviews from people in terms of their experience, origin, type of hitchhiking, socio-cultural background, involvement in the community, participation in other related events, and lifestyle.

In the course of the research period, I additionally came into contact, and sustained conversations, with a number of people outside of a formal interview setting. These discussions, often spontaneous and unplanned, can still offer a new perspective or point out something which has been previously overlooked. In a later stage of research, they can help to contextualize information that has been gathered, and validate or challenge working hypotheses the ethnographer holds. The topic of hitchhiking has been informally discussed with both people inside and outside the community in the course of this inquiry, and thus further insight into the opinions of hitchhikers and the perspectives of outsiders on the practice could be gained. These informal conversations with drivers, travel acquaintances, and other hitchhikers were sketched out in the field diary.

### 2.3.5 Field Diary

The field diary is one of the ethnographer’s most useful tools, enabling them to document their observations, conversations, ideas, and dispositions. In the field diary, protocols chronicle exactly the situations encountered during the investigation. They note the time and place, observations made, context information, as well as reflections upon methods, roles of the researcher, and theoretical implications.

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153 During my stay at the hitchgathering, I was not the only one conducting interviews. Two other women were also collecting data, one for a book on female hitchhiking, and one for a thesis in communication design.

154 See Cohn 2014, p. 78.
The field diary written for this inquiry was developed through a process of two stages. The first stage is materialized in a number of small notebooks filled with hastily jotted down notes, partly in a personal shorthand. They contain the time, place, and duration of each wait faced and lift taken, descriptions of all personal encounters, records of the emotional highs and lows experienced, notes on conversations taken part in or overheard, accounts of all activities undertaken and observations made for the duration of my stays with the hitchhikers, and various reflections upon my role and relationships, as well as the methods used. This conglomerate of data was created impromptu and on site, and consistently expanded. The small dimensions of the notebooks allowed for them to be constantly carried on the person, and for inconspicuous note-taking. In a second stage, a more proper field diary was written immediately upon return to Hamburg. Here, the notes were translated into a narrative text which was later coded and analyzed. Reflections previously eluded to in short notes were expanded and elaborated upon. Using the notes as an aid to memory, more details were added to the account. Additionally, a number of site maps and charts were drawn up.

2.4 Materials Gathered

The combination of methods used here yielded a wealth of different materials which were then analyzed and integrated to form a comprehensive image aspiring to the ideal of thick description\(^{155}\). Given the at times strong emotional involvement of the researcher, the question of how to achieve the required distance from the material in order to ‘objectify’ and rationalize the experience presented itself. This was achieved on the one hand through the simple fact of temporal distance, letting the materials rest, occupying myself elsewhere and returning to them later. Furthermore, the synthesis of autoethnographic and other materials proved useful, as this permitted the validation or challenge of my perception of experiences. By involving further resources, texts, and perspectives, and reestablishing reference to the research questions and theoretical models, some distance from the collected materials could be achieved.\(^{156}\) Thus, the perceived disproportion of closeness and distance was rectified through careful introspection and the integration of diverse resources. Each method used has its own scale and scope and can be used to answer different specific questions. While participant observation grants insight into practices and interac-


tions, auto-ethnography sheds light on corporeality and emotion, and narrative interviews disclose self-image and constructions of meaning. Thus, not every method was equally relevant to each research question, but rather they balanced each other out to form an extensive image of European hitchhiking today. Obviously, this thesis does not speak of all hitchhikers, not even all European ones. It speaks specifically of those encountered in the field, those that seek out community related hitchhiking events. There are of course many people who hitchhike in Europe without ever tracking down the others, be it out of disinterest or because they simply don’t know a community exists.

The 15 interviews conducted during the hitchgathering varied in length between 8 and 50 minutes. The interviewees were aged between 19 and 37 years. Seven of the interviewed hitchhikers were women, eight were men. Their nationalities were German, Dutch, English, Scottish, Polish, Italian, French, Australian, and Indian. Two of the hitchhikers were persons of color. Six of the interviewees were currently traveling long-term, and of the other nine, four had taken up (temporary) residence in a country other than their native state. Their experience and community integration ranged from beginners new to the scene to well-networked expert travelers. Ten of the hitchhikers at some point mentioned a university enrollment. Among the interviewees there were writers of hitchhiking blogs, activists for different causes, sport hitchhikers, modern hippies, organizers of the hitchgathering, and avid chroniclers (intersections apply). The interviews were minutely transcribed, preserving each pause, //umm//, slip of the tongue, laughter, interruption, and other sounds. Additionally, interview protocols containing information on body language, activities, and relation to researcher were composed.

The field diary contains reports on a total of 97 rides taken in Germany, Poland, Denmark, the Netherlands, France, and Switzerland, covering a total distance of about 7400km. Of these rides, 53 were with single men, 3 of whom had a child in their car, and 18 with single women, one of whom had two children with her. 16 lifts were taken with couples, 3 of which had children along. 10 rides were taken with other constellations of people, such as friends, colleagues, or a music band. The nationalities of my drivers were German (39), French (22), Danish (14), Polish (13), Dutch (7), Irish (1), and Swiss (1). I have taken 50 lifts on my own, 26 accompanied by a male partner, 16 in the company of a female partner, two short rides accompanied by two men, and three short rides in the company of two men and one woman. In sum, I have partnered up with two women and eight men during the research period. Of the 97 rides, 85 were perfectly fine, and 12 involved some degree of discomfort due to a disagreeable driving style, suspicion of substance abuse, erratic behavior, awkward or distanced communication, unsavory
opinions uttered, suspicion of questionable intentions, verbal harassment, or insistence on discussing sexual topics. Equally, 12 lifts were experienced as outstandingly felicitous, where a remarkable personal connection was established.

Moreover, the field diary contains all observations made during the stays with the hitchhikers. All materials collected at the events, such as stickers and flyers, have been compiled. Additional attention was paid to newspaper articles, blogs and the activities in virtual groups. The fragmented and manifold resources that had been collected required a prudent engagement and careful dialogue in order to assemble them into an emergent composition that would extend the knowledge on hitchhiking and render the life world and subjectivity of its practitioners clear without resorting to simplified solutions and conclusions.

All interview transcripts and the entire field diary were interpreted using qualitative content analysis based on the methods devised by Philipp Mayring. This enabled the systematic development of aspects that are common to interview responses, both in terms of explicit content and latent meaning. The method combines explorative openness and comprehensible rule-governed analysis through the implication of coding. The material is coded and analyzed in order to inductively devise categories as theoretical components, making visible orders and structures inherent in the texts. Coding serves to achieve a higher level of abstraction and enables to relate the different text sections to one another, a process which is dynamic, flexible, and achieved in several stages of reading and re-reading. This method allows for a representation of the material that is maximally close to the matter and minimizes the risk of distortion through presumptions.157

As I had no hypotheses to confirm or disprove, the process of continuous data comparison, writing, and literature review progressed rather organically.

3. Riding with Strangers

3.1 Prolegomena

At this point, the focus of this work will shift from a theoretical perspective on hitching to an analysis of the practical execution, to answer the question of what knowledge and skills experienced hitchhikers share as members of the community of practice. Before delineating this shared repertoire, it will be outlined why people take up hitchhiking, what particular role apprenticeship plays in the practice, and how it is influenced by gender.

There are different types of hitchhiking, each with some own requirements and strategies. The distance to travel prescribes different routes, roads, and equipment, the time restrictions stipulate different techniques. There is a difference whether one hitches to the next town or across the continent, and whether one hitches competitively in a race, or leisurely at one’s own pace. The auto-ethnographic data forming the basis of this research was mostly generated in the context of long-distance, multi-day highway hitchhiking, and so much of the following descriptions pertains to this type of hitching.

3.1.1 Entry Points - Why People Start Hitchhiking

Many people I spoke to initially fell into hitchhiking accidentally, and might have never voluntarily taken up the practice. Missed busses, pressing appointments, and unexpected success feature heavily in these tales:

“Like many people I’ve heard here, like, //umm// the first time it happened I, like, I hadn’t missed a bus but I got off the bus really really too late, like when I was almost in the next town. Aand I got out, I was like, late for something and I just stuck out my thumb and a car stopped like almost immediately. […] And I was really like: Wow! Is it that easy? Holy shit! Like, (laughs) it’s all true!”^158

Second to sheer necessity, a general lack of convenient options was invoked, sometimes in an everyday setting, as in cases of school busses that always run at the wrong time, or in holiday settings, where endless hikes are thus shortened. One interviewee claims rebellion as her original cause: “Basically because someone told me I shouldn’t.”^159 For others, hitchhiking only became an available, thinkable option for them after meeting people who “made that idea possible.”^160 This inspiration by others is often immediately combined with an apprenticeship. Very few appeared to have started hitchhiking without being prompted to do so from the outside, and nearly all seemed to have positive first experiences, without which they may have never made it to community events, as “those who have a scary experience the first time usually never do it again”.^161

After their first experiences, which have demonstrated to the novice hitcher that the practice is in fact feasible, they may make the conscious decision to hitchhike deliberately, and to learn the attendant skills and techniques. Quite likely, they will seek out online resources to equip themselves with a basic understanding, and to avoid blatant mistakes. They may also seek out others to hitchhike with, perhaps in the context of a race, or through an online network. After making first attempts at hitchhiking and realizing

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All interviewee names have been changed.

^159 Transcript Sarah. p. 30.

^160 Transcript Naomi. p. 147.

their affinity for, and increasing competence in the practice, they may gradually develop the challenge and context of their trips, and perhaps continue to participate in community events. Many hitchhikers initially ease into it, collecting first experiences with manageable distances and routes, until they feel reasonably assured of themselves. They may then change the context of their journeys and integrate the practice into their everyday lives, and come to see it as a means to achieve mundane mobility, instead of solely as an element of holidays and out-of-the-ordinary movement.

“Dann hab ich mir irgendwann gedacht: Warum fahr ich eigentlich Zug? Das is ja total sinnlos, ich könnt ja trampen.”\(^\text{162}\)

They are also likely to extend the length of their journeys, and to feel more confident in practicing this mobility form in a growing range of countries. As beginning hitchers perform the practice on more occasions and longer journeys, the scope of their experience and skill grows, and with it their fondness for the practice. This increases the allure of community contact, and the likelihood of incorporating hitchhiking into their identities.

### 3.1.2 Apprenticeship

Several interviewees were introduced to the practice by people who already ‘knew about it’. Here, knowing about hitchhiking is not to be understood as simply being aware of the practice’s existence, but rather being proficient in the techniques and skills hitchhiking entails.

“And I recognized really that it was so important to (. ) to be with someone who knows how to do it. It's kind of an art. There are some-, or a technique at least. It's not something, I mean you have to be in the right place to (. ) the right time (. ) the right mindset (laughs). And //uh// so for the beginning I, I felt it was so important to have somebody supporting me and (. ) telling me suggestions.”\(^\text{163}\)

In taking on an apprenticeship, aspiring hitchhikers can learn first-hand what cannot easily be taught by a how-to-article, as it is “impossible to specify and hence codify all the knowledge involved in even the most elementary practice”.\(^\text{164}\) This cannot be achieved by hitchwiki or any other resource of the hitchhikers’ shared repertoire, and it is not attempted here either. Through apprenticeship, novice hitchhikers access tacit knowledge: knowledge that is largely bound to the person, local, difficult to express, and context-specific. As such, it can hardly be generalized, formalized, and communicated, and it cannot completely and without loss be translated into teachable and learnable

\(^{162}\)“And then at some point I thought: Why am I even taking the train? That's pretty pointless, I might as well be hitching.” Transcript Adam. p .12.  
^{163}\)Transcript Jacob. p. 100.  
material, such as rules and laws. This elemental divide between knowledge and expression has been most poignantly summarized by Michael Polanyi, when he wrote: “[W]e can know more than we can tell.”

Far from being theoretical or detached, the learning-by-doing of hitchhiking is thus “a social phenomenon constituted in the experienced, lived-in world, through [...] ongoing social practice”. A hitchhiking apprentice’s learning is situated in practice, and achieved through socialization, visualization, and imitation, as tacit knowledge “is displayed or exemplified, not transmitted”. This tacit knowledge includes the appropriate attitudes of the practice: it is much easier when one steels oneself with unwavering optimism, confidence, and assurance.

“And I think you, yeah, you have to be at least, have, be a bit positive (.) to (.), otherwise you won’t believe that people will stop for you. [...] If you don’t believe it, you shouldn’t do it.”

In a society that places much value on financial independence, self-worth in part hinges on personal achievements and abilities, and accepting the charity of others is connected to shame. In taking on an apprenticeship, novices may learn from the more experienced hitchhiker not only the practical nuts and bolts, but also the attitudes with which to react to adversity, frustration, and rejection. Some hitchhikers allude to a kind of universal echo, which rewards positivity by reflecting it back.

3.1.3 The Gendered Experience

Although there is no cogent reason why hitchhiking in itself should be different for people of different genders, the fact that it is a social practice embedded in this world makes it so. In the eyes of a driver, hitchhikers are positioned on a spectrum between ‘vulnerable’ and ‘threatening’. A hitchhiker will do well in occupying neither extreme, but this spectrum poses problems to all hitchhikers: men struggle with being perceived as more threatening, and so generally will have to wait longer for a ride. Women on the other hand are perceived as more vulnerable, which may mean shorter waiting times.

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169 Transcript Lucas. p. 46.
but the dynamics of power can create unsafe situations once in the car. Women are therefore generally more aware of possible risks, and of measures suited to mitigate those risks.

There is a widespread mental connection between females hitchhiking and prostitution, promiscuity, or sexual compensation for the ride. It needs nothing more than a google image search for ‘female hitchhiker’ to find a plethora of stock images of scantily dressed, flirtatious women offering their bodies up suggestively to any driver passing by. This popular imagery points to a well-established conception of female hitchhikers as promiscuous and accessible, and actual female hitchhikers are well aware of this. They take explicit measures in their self-presentation to make sure there is no mistaking their intentions, and no confusing their mobility for sexual availability. Nevertheless, they are confronted with numerous instances of verbal or physical sexual harassment, to a point where for many this is an expected part of any hitchhiking journey.

“Like the other day, I was in Alsbeg in Germany and a guy stopped. He wasn’t being very clear where he wants to go. I was like: Where you going? ’Alsbeg.’ I’m IN Alsbeg, where are you going? And he was like: ’Shou- //umm// sex?’”

Hitchhiking is also made different for women by frequent requests to justify themselves. While most of these questions come from a place of well-intentioned concern or genuine curiosity, the very repetitiveness of questions like “But isn’t this very dangerous for you?”, “Aren’t you afraid?”, and “Are you sure you should be doing this alone?” will start to ring like a challenge of a woman’s right to self-determination and freedom of movement at some point. This is especially so when a female hitchhiker has collected vast experience and feels that she knows what she is doing. People have gone out of their way to approach me while hitching, not to offer a ride but to tell me stories about ‘girls’ going missing, and then acted genuinely surprised when I remained unfazed.

Female hitchhiking has often and early been treated as recklessness, deviance, and delinquency, not only in the media, but also in academia. Somewhat patronizingly, it is often stated as fact that ‘women should not hitchhike alone’. This causes exasperation in many of the women I encountered, for whom the practice is an act of liberation and empowerment. Many do not appreciate being told what women should and should not do. Still, they appreciate their own physical intactness, and are inescapably aware of the

170 There are also drivers who fear being blackmailed with wrongful accusations of assault, and for this reason hesitate to take female hitchhikers. In this way, women, too, become threatening. And of course, male hitchhikers can fall victim to all the same crimes as women do.
171 Transcript Sarah. p. 34.
172 Note the infantilization: Many people will casually refer to adult women as ‘girls’ when addressing their purported need of protection.
risks. They would not want to portray the practice as safer than it is: “I would never just
tell a woman who has never hitchhiked that it’s just great and safe and fantastic. I would
never do that.”

Rather, they would like for women to be able to find the information
necessary to hitchhike responsibly, preparedly, and as safely as possible, while making
their own choices. The practice is never entirely safe, not for men either. On the one
hand, steering clear of all potentially dangerous places, times, and practices would limit
women in their mobility and agency to a degree that most find simply unacceptable. On
the other hand, even a confinement to the domestic sphere will not guarantee a wom-

an’s safety: most violence against women is perpetrated in their homes, by men they
know. It is thus a common misconception that women put themselves in danger by
traveling - that would require them to first be safe at home. Ultimately, they quite sim-
ply see it as their inalienable right to travel as they do, and as men do without having to
defend their choices nearly as much.

“Obviously people are aware that //umm// hitchhiking is dangerous. But I’ve always
just considered it as much as-as as dangerous as the rest of society. [...] So (.) it is just
as much of a risk getting in a car than (.) walking down the street I guess. People will-
people who are out to get you, are out to get you //umm// e-everywhere.”

3.2 What Hitchhikers Know About Hitchhiking

Hitchhikers’ “resistant mobilities unsettle the familiar and accepted ways of moving,
dwelling and doing as they trade speed, convenience and time (rather than cash) for
experiences, encounters and connections.” Though their mobility may at first glance
resemble a haphazard set of activities, it is in fact a complex process that “carries kudos
and status value.” There are many theories, rules and ideas about what a hitcher can
do to increase their chances of a timely, pleasant, long, and safe lift. Hitchhiking is far
from a random activity that simply relies on circumstance or ‘luck’. While this plays a
certain role, there are distinct techniques that can be employed to maximize one’s
 chances of fortune coming into play. Hitchhiking is essentially a numbers game: at any
given moment and place, many people will not stop for a hitchhiker, but hitchers try to
maximize the number of people who potentially could and would.

“Probably it’s not right to say, but //uh// I think the probability for a woman to get a
ride is a little higher than for a guy to get a ride. And then, being [...] a non-European,
//uh// and a brown guy, my probability would be [...] slightly lesser. And, but that
doesn't mean I wouldn't get a ride, [...] basically I need a longer time. [...] There might be some instances of racism or something, but, you know, it's //uh// that would be just like regular life, I guess.\textsuperscript{179}

There are definite things that a hitchhiker can do to expedite their mobility, and inversely, there are mistakes the hitchhiker can make which will delay their journey. Many of these techniques have been known for a long time, by hitchers of all eras. The motorscape they traverse presents itself to hitchhikers as a “fluid space, an assemblage of signified features evolving in function according to the activities they need to perform.”\textsuperscript{180} Their skillful engagement with this assemblage allows them to “orchestrate in complex and heterogeneous ways their mobilities and socialities, and therefore their identities across very significant distances.”\textsuperscript{181} Obviously, what I know of other people’s hitchhiking experiences and tactics is what they offered about them. How each of the people I interviewed or talked to during this research personally behave while hitchhiking remains unknown. I have, however, travelled both long and short distances with others, and consulted a number of online resources.

The “systematic ways of getting around”\textsuperscript{182} developed by hitchhikers bring them into a position which is not random, but tactical: “an expression of emancipation, empowerment, skill, competencies and knowledge that’s unavailable in a guidebook”.\textsuperscript{183} This knowledge is always personal, situational, embodied and enacted. In the case of hitchhiking, there is no detached, universal knowledge, no “knowledge without knowers”.\textsuperscript{184} Neither is there a set curriculum to complete, a finite body of knowledge that can be entirely learnt. To become a full participant in this community of practice, one must both learn how to hitchhike and learn how to be a hitchhiker. These processes are intertwined, not separate, they determine each other and run parallel in time: “Knowledgeable skill is encompassed in the process of assuming an identity as a practitioner, of becoming a full participant, and oldtimer.”\textsuperscript{185} Just as hitchhiking is practiced over and over again, leading to a deepening knowledge and understanding of the practice, the engagement with the community is sought out time and time again, with each meeting strengthening commitment, belonging, and the development of a community identity. At this point, the execution of the practice itself will be in focus, while noting the influ-

\textsuperscript{179} Transcript Sam. pp. 97f.
\textsuperscript{180} O’REGAN 2013. p. 41.
\textsuperscript{181} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{182} LAVIOLETTE 2016. p. 385.
\textsuperscript{183} O’REGAN 2013. p. 45.
\textsuperscript{184} BARTH 2002. p. 2.
\textsuperscript{185} LAVE 1991. p. 68.
ence of the community as a construct, before moving on to an analysis of the attendant individual and group identities.

3.2.1 Preparation

Equipment

In packing for a hitchhiking journey, travelers must equip themselves with appropriate objects for many different possible situations. Apart from the personal items that would be taken on a journey regardless of mobility form, hitchhikers carry on their journeys several specific objects which form the material foundation of hitchhiking. In general, hitchhikers prefer to travel as light as possible, as the volume and weight of one's belongings can become bothersome on the road.

The backpack is the hitchhikers’ most popular form of luggage. It is practical in that it allows for flexibility and leaves the hands free, but is also associated with adventure and specific forms of travel. It makes the hitcher more relatable to drivers, as it discloses information on their travel style and intentions. Clothing should be appropriate to changing weather conditions and conductive to hitchhiking. This means that it will neither offend nor intimidate car drivers, nor encourage misinterpretation of one’s intentions. Bright colors are both highly visible and non-threatening. Maps enable hitchhikers to keep track of their routes, and change them should an opportunity arise. Many have offline maps saved on smartphones that they carry, but most rely on physical, printed maps, as these are independent from batteries and can also more easily be inspected by several people at a time, facilitating communication with prospective drivers. Hitchhikers use maps that show at least highway exits and amenity stations, as these are the most important points of reference during long-distance hitchhiking. Some carry elaborately enhanced maps showing opportunities for highway crossings, adding another layer of complexity to their construction of routes. Many carry materials for making signs, or at least a marker pen, as cardboard can be easily found in many places. Camping gear, such as a tent, sleeping bag, and sometimes cooking equipment, makes the hitchhikers more self-sufficient and autonomous. It allows for taking multiple-day journeys without being dependent on finding accommodation on the road. A hitcher may pitch their tent inconspicuously, sleep in highway stations, or in a long lift through the night. Food supplies make the hitcher independent from highway businesses, the merchandise of which is quite often overpriced. Hitchhikers traveling to a place they don’t speak the language of may bring a printed phrasebook, which can be found online for
They contain common phrases used in hitchhiking and independent travel, and can be employed when communicating about lifts, public transport, food, accommodation, and directions to different places. Some hitchhikers choose to carry weapons, such as pepper spray, or objects that can easily be used as weapons. Others find this unnecessary, or even that it adds to, rather than detracts from a feeling of threat.

Some objects, like the backpack, maps, and signs, fulfill a dual purpose: on the one hand, they are practical and useful, on the other hand, they enable drivers to easily recognize hitchhikers as ‘proper’ travelers, as opposed to runaways or prostitutes. These objects thus lend visible legitimacy to a hitcher, who appears to be going somewhere, and to know what they’re doing.

Knowing the Territory

In choosing their routes, hitchhikers exhibit an understanding of what makes sense to drivers. They hardly go by the most direct route, but rather along highway trajectories that are likely to be shared by many drivers. Big cities that draw a lot of traffic and highway intersections that send drivers in many directions present obstacles to be overcome. Hitchhikers are generally flexible with their routes, and will work with what they are offered. If their routes involve ferry passages, they will find out beforehand if the ferry is hitchable.

It is important to correctly estimate one’s own ability and stamina when choosing a route, or destination. Too long a stretch can leave the hitchhiker exhausted, and if an ample time frame isn’t given, hitchhiking can become stressful and unenjoyable. When a journey is unlikely to be completed in a day, the hitchhiker should be prepared for this both mentally and in the form of equipment. It is possible and viable to hitchhike through the night. There is less traffic, and people tend to be more wary of strangers, but hitchhikers are more likely to find lifts going for very long distances.

Hitchhikers aim to know their territory not only in terms of geography and routes, but also in terms of culture and language. Some trouble can be avoided by being aware of certain dispositions held by the local population one wishes to ride with. This includes different cultural associations with women travelling alone, the meaning of certain hand gestures, and the commonality of hitchers paying their drivers gas money after the lift.

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186 E.g. hitchwiki.org/en/Phrasebook [last accessed July 15th, 2016].

187 In the eyes of a hitcher there are two types of ferries: those that charge per individual passenger, and those that charge per vehicle, thus allowing the traveler to hitch onto the ferry, and possibly find a new driver on board.

188 I have found my longest lift of 600km while hitchhiking through the night.
Speaking at least minimal phrases in the local language can be tremendously helpful, and the more languages the hitcher speaks, the better are their chances of finding common ground with their drivers.

**Taking a Friend**

The choice of whether one hitchhikes alone or with a companion strongly influences the quality of the journey. While hitching alone heightens the sense of self-reliance and autonomy, it also makes the hitcher more vulnerable. There is safety in companionship, but all decisions need to be taken together. The lone hitcher may find a ride quicker, as they appear less threatening, and some cars only have space for one more passenger. When hitchhiking actively, however, a team can cover more ground and approach more people. Stretches of boredom, loneliness, and ostracization are much more bearable with a companion, as sharing frustration helps to keep spirits up. The relationship to drivers tends to be more intimate when riding alone, but the work of communication and relationship building is relentless. When traveling together, hitchhikers may share the burden during waiting and riding alike, and take turns resting and recuperating. I perceived a strong emotional bond between my long-distance hitchpartners and me, forged by the out-of-the-ordinary quality of a hitchhiking journey, the shared overcoming of adversity, and the sustained reliance on the other.

Some research participants also reported hitching long distances in groups of four or more. This type of hitching strongly diminishes chances of finding a timely lift, both for reasons of drivers’ safety concerns, and the purely physical space a human body occupies. It prioritizes the experience of having an adventure with friends over making progress at a reasonable speed, as waiting times can routinely reach several hours. Over long distances, the arrangement will likely reach a breaking point at which a desire for progress outweighs the pleasure of spending time as a group, which will then split up in favor of speed and meet again at a stipulated destination.

**Hitchhiking Locations**

The first location of a journey is most likely within a city. When starting a journey from a new city, the first step for most hitchers, including me, is to look up possible locations on hitchwiki. The location database registers nearly 2800 hitchhiking locations in Germany alone. For most locations, information on how to get there by public transport or on foot, as well as comments on the quality of the spot and waiting times others experienced are included. Ideally, the hitchhiker will thumb in a place where the driver’s needs are met, thus demonstrating an understanding of their perspective. In such a place, cars
don’t go very fast, it is visible from some distance\textsuperscript{189}, and safe to stand in. It offers an obvious, legal place to stop without endangerment or holding up traffic. Not every place people hitch from meets these requirements, but that doesn’t make hitching impossible. Rather, it extends the waiting time to be expected. Popular city locations are bus stops, intersections, and highway entrances. Some hitchhikers are willing to walk significant distances to reach a suitable location, particularly those of an athletic persuasion, as evidenced by their participation in races following the Russian model, which include elements of orienteering and hiking.

Once in the highway system, hitchhikers will try to stick to amenity stations, but there are national differences that influence a hitcher’s tactics. For example, highway entrances in Denmark always have a second lane, which is suited for hitchhiking. In France, toll stations constitute an additional option. Gas stations and highway restaurants offer several possibilities for hitchers. One may take up the spot at the very end of the area, where all lanes meet to merge back into the highway, and continue thumbing passively. Walking onto the highway is illegal, but more importantly in many countries both futile and terrifying. Many hitchhikers will, if given the chance, choose active hitchhiking over passive. In this mode, drivers are addressed directly and asked for a lift. This variety is more efficient, as drivers can make an immediate and personal assessment of the hitcher. They may also feel more personally responsible, and it is harder to reject somebody face to face than it is to drive past them. Men generally appear to prefer this method, as it can significantly shorten waiting times. But hitchhikers also appreciate its advantage of allowing them to actively choose their drivers, perhaps after observing them for a short time. In active hitchhiking, instead of the driver choosing to stop, and the hitcher then choosing to enter the car, the order of choices being made is inversed. Hitchers may also try to identify particularly promising cars by their license plates. Additionally, truck drivers can be approached in the parking lot, which may yield long and comfortable rides. Active hitching requires more self-confidence, as the hitcher will have to directly approach a number of strangers, and deal with more direct rejection, which may make them feel like “a beggar”\textsuperscript{190}. It requires practice:

“That’s different from person to person, but (...) I wasss, like the first year I was kind of too shy to show up on service stations on the highway //uh// and //uh// talk with people, I was a bit too shy for that, it was like a barrier for me.”\textsuperscript{191}

\textsuperscript{189} One of the research participants has a 6-second-rule: this is how long the driver should have time to think before having to act.

\textsuperscript{190} Transcript Jacob. p. 100.

\textsuperscript{191} Transcript Peter. p. 22.
I personally prefer hitching passively, as I have had uncomfortable rides with people who appeared to feel coerced into giving the lift. However, whenever speed or safety were at a premium, such as during races, and at night, or any time I grew impatient of waiting, I chose to hitch actively.

3.2.2 Waiting

The wait of a hitchhiker has a peculiar quality. While other travelers with timetables and tickets may ease themselves into waiting and even enjoy an incarceration-vacation, the hitchhiker is awarded no such exoneration from responsibility. “When there is a stream of traffic, the hitcher must ‘perform’ for every oncoming vehicle.” They cannot afford to be complacent, they must work for their ride. Eternally suspended in anticipation, even during the longest waits, the hitcher has to be ready to jump into somebody’s car at a moment’s notice. Their perception of time, thus, “has very little to do with the numbers with which we measure it.” A short wait can seem quite long, and a truly long wait, agonizing in its combination of anticipation and boredom.

“After a long time of hitchhiking, you just get really accustomed to highways, to gas stations, to the whole system of it, which is maybe also not so pure in your mind. It’s just another system going into your head and all the noises next to the road, they kind of like, go into your ear. […] You get accustomed to very dull things.”

Hitchhikers have a few activities at their disposal to pass the time, but some, such as reading and smoking, may be obstructive to getting a lift. Many will sing or hum, or speak to themselves, or dance a little to stave off the boredom. Sitting is considered bad form. While they are waiting, some hitchhikers will mark their territory by leaving a trace of their passing in the form of stickers or hitchers’ marks on signs, poles, or guardrails. Hitchhiking stickers are available at many races and gatherings, and advertise either the activity itself, or associations and information sources. Participants are encouraged to take them on their journeys and attach them where they see fit, often at hitchhiking locations. This mild form of vandalism marks places where hitchhikers pass, makes the practice subtly visible in public space, and reaches out to novices unaware of the community.

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192 When travelling by plane or train, passengers are forced into a position of passivity for the duration of their wait and transport, they linger temporarily in spaces which are ordered for them, in which the chaos of the world is suspended, and in which they have no decisions to make and no responsibilities.


195 On waiting, see also: EH N, Billy; LÖFGREN, Orvar: The Secret World of Doing Nothing. Los Angeles, CA 2010.

196 Transcript Hannah. pp. 119f.

197 For examples, see Appendix 6.6.
police. Hitchhiking is not illegal, but police will routinely remind hitchers not to walk onto the highway, and check their identification cards to ascertain they are not wanted criminals, teenage runaways, or illegal immigrants. They may also want to check the baggage for drugs. Some hitchhikers talk about their police encounters with glee, as it legitimizes their standing as ‘outlaw’, and police stories allow for the representation of one’s disdain for authority as well as drug and migration laws.

When encountering other hitchhikers, which I have several times during research, I noted a distinct unspoken etiquette. Most will approach for a chat, share notes on their journey and waiting time, and perhaps suggest teaming up. When they find a lift for themselves, they may propose to pick up the other as well. At the very least, a friendly wave or a nod of recognition was exchanged, and the first hitcher’s claim to their chosen location or territory was always respected. Hitchhikers recognize each other as belonging to the same imagined community, and act accordingly in exhibiting solidarity and respect.

Highway gas and rest stations are not designed with the hitchhiker in mind, but are appropriated by them. Through their prolonged dwelling, their appropriation of ‘dead’ space, and their marking of conquered territory, hitchhikers make places out of non-places. Additionally, “by their very presence outdoors along road networks, they re-humanise the landscape.”198

**Presenting Oneself**

In the presentation of self, the hitcher has at their disposal bodily postures and body language. These follow a socially defined vocabulary that needs to be learnt, understood, interpreted, and employed correctly in order to define and play out social situations. Like a theatrical performance, every social situation we find ourselves in is defined, and every individual has a role to play in order not to disturb the situation. The dramaturgical problems of self-presentation are crucially linked to the production and manipulation of impressions, the goal being to leave the ‘right’ impression of one’s person, character, status, intentions, and motivations. This manipulation is primarily a bodily performance, an attempt at applying gestures, facial expressions, direction of view, speech, voice, posture, movements, pace, clothes, demeanor, and appearance in a way that is deemed appropriate.199 Apart from speech and voice, all of these aspects of

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communication, and additional props, are available to the hitchhiker to configure their *intention display*\textsuperscript{200} and make it legible to others.

When a hitcher appears in the windscreen, drivers have to make the decision to stop or to pass instantaneously. Experienced hitchhikers will aim to present themselves in a manner that makes them immediately recognizable as trustworthy. Their appearance should tell drivers a story they can relate to at first glance, as the “environment beyond that windscreen is an alien other, kept at bay through the diverse privatizing technologies incorporated within the car.”\textsuperscript{201} The car has become more and more private and home-like as new technologies became widely available, especially features which provide visible assurance of the occupants’ safety. But “[t]o be reminded of safety is to be reminded of dangers and risks”.\textsuperscript{202} Suspicion abounds, and drivers are increasingly likely to see hitchhikers as “members of a non-car-owning underclass – the criminal, the mentally ill, or voluntary misfits seen as undeserving of ‘charity’ in the form of a lift.”\textsuperscript{203}

Communication between the hitchhiker and prospective drivers remains non-verbal until a person actually stops. It consists of body language, visual signals, and possibly acoustic signals.\textsuperscript{204} The main message lies in the very posture hitchers place their bodies in: standing upright with their arm stretched out in the direction of the road, thumb protruding from the closed hand.\textsuperscript{205} Through social conventions, this simple gesture has a very clear meaning, signaling not only the desire to be invited into somebody’s car, but also the expectation of not paying for it, as well as a confidence which distances itself from the humility of begging. This confidence has been known since the “earliest years of hitchhiking, [when] one observer noted that ‘... their manner was of confident assurance, a manner well known to all successful hitch-hikers.’ Some called it impudence.”\textsuperscript{206} Assurance is key: hitchhikers need to be both confident in themselves and assuring the driver that they are making a sound decision in picking them up.

Hitching involves a good deal of lay psychology, and practitioners have developed a number of techniques to project trustworthiness. Their clothes are often colorful and bright, and they aim to dress in a way that is appropriate to the host culture. Most hitchers’ clothes are neither provocative nor neglected, and many carry a set of ‘Sunday


\textsuperscript{201} URRY 2006. p. 23.

\textsuperscript{202} CHESTERS; SMITH 2001. p. 6.

\textsuperscript{203} GARNER 2008 a. p. 4.

\textsuperscript{204} See SCHMAUKS 2003. pp. 119-127.

\textsuperscript{205} This gesture is not globally valid: e.g. in eastern Mediterranean countries, it is an insult, and a swaying movement of the flatly extended hand is used for hitching.

\textsuperscript{206} SCHLEBECKER 1958. p. 323. Citation in citation: NEW YORK TIMES, Oct. 12, 1925. p. 20.
best’ garments specifically for hitchhiking, no matter the state of the rest of their wardrobe. Some wear locally recognizable clothes, such as a *Tour de France* jersey. A few particularly athletically-minded hitchers wear Russian hitchhiking uniforms. Hitchhikers avoid objects that obscure the face or in any other way make them look less identifiable and more intimidating, such as sunglasses, hoods, and certain types of hats. They try to make eye contact, or at least look hopefully at the part of the windscreens the driver is supposed to be behind. This is said to lessen anonymity and facilitate a sense of personal responsibility in the driver. Their smile is a somewhat overacted stage-smile, and ideally it persists irrespectively of the person’s actual mood. The sign, if one is used, lends legitimacy to their position as ‘actual’, ‘proper’ hitchhiker, and also speaks to those who go that way. Another such legitimizing prop is the backpack, which is often displayed, additionally making visible that their baggage is manageable. Supplementary recognizable objects, e.g. musical instruments, skateboards, or hula hoops can be displayed to make oneself relatable and tell drivers something about oneself. In appearing clean, pleasant, relatable, eager, and upbeat, the hitcher maximizes their chances for a timely lift by underscoring the fact that they are hitchhiking by choice rather than out of sheer necessity. In a cruel twist of fate, many drivers will give lifts only to those who do not appear to need them badly. But where there is a road, and there is traffic, hitchhiking is never impossible. The many techniques that can be employed to increase one’s chances ultimately only decrease the wait. Not all hitchers hitch the same way, and not all are willing to sacrifice their visible expressions of non-conformism to relatability to a greater number of drivers. The body is political: in being unapologetically unshaven, uncombed, and unwashed, some distance themselves visibly and bodily from what they perceive as the oppressive normativity of the dominant order. And still, they get a ride.

**Rejection**

Drivers passing by may justify their passing with a number of gestures and facial expressions meant to express their reason for not stopping. Common gestures are sweeping or pointing motions indicating they will soon leave the highway, pointing downwards at the steering wheel to say they are not going far, pointing to the backseat to indicate the car

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207 One recognizable and very trusted uniform is that of wandering tradespeople (*Gesellen*), who are held to high moral standards. Wearing one without being a *Geselle*, however, makes one an impostor.

208 Only available through Russian hitchhiking clubs, these yellow and red jumpsuits with reflectors are suited for adverse weather conditions and night hitchhiking.

209 The usefulness of signs is contested among hitchhikers: Some say it attracts drivers who feel addressed because they are in fact going to the requested destination; others claim it deters those from stopping who are going in that direction, but not all the way. Some experiment with text other than destinations, such as "North", "Not Far", or "Next Gas Station".
is full, or simply apologetic gestures like shrugging. This usually goes so quickly that the hitchhiker doesn't get a chance to reply, even if a short ride would indeed be helpful. In any case hitchers suspect this interaction to be not so much about inviting an answer as it is about absolving the driver from blame. I noted that while many drivers will simply ignore the hitchhiker, those with a visibly crammed car will make apologetic gestures almost without fail, as if relieved to have such an obvious and indisputable exculpation. Other drivers make gestures that seem random and illegible, as if they felt the need to react somehow but didn’t know how. Others yet may ridicule, dismiss, or insult the hitchhiker by returning the thumb-gesture (possibly turned around), giving a dismissive wave, or a rude hand gesture such as the middle finger or tapping the temple. This may be emphasized by roaring the engine or sounding the horn. Standing in a spot with no obvious and legal stopping place will result in uncomprehending gestures and facial expressions, such as shrugs, raised eyebrows, and questioning hand gestures.210

When hitchhiking actively, the hitcher will hear many reasons for declining from drivers, and in general will accept them without question, even when they sense them to be lies. Few drivers will tell hitchers outright that they will not take hitchhikers, most will instead present an explanation for why they cannot, or claim their destination to be unhelpful. The richer the driver appears, the more obvious and expected is the rejection. Politeness is paramount, and hitchers will not want to appear obtrusive or aggressive. The people I have hitchhiked long distances with, and myself, always made a point of leaving an unwilling driver alone immediately and wishing them a good trip, even in moments of near despair. Having a pleasant encounter with polite hitchhikers may open them up to the idea of one day giving a lift, and either way it is unlikely that they will be persuaded after declining.

But experienced hitchhikers will not accept every lift that is offered to them, either. Most are refused for practical reasons: a short ride to an unfavorable location is not preferable to remaining in a tactically sound position. But a few ride offers are declined for another reason: gut instinct. This elusive concept entails a mode of decision-making that is far from being a rational process of evaluating known facts. It is instead based on the corporeal reaction to a given situation. Here, the somatically felt body is read for signs of discomfort signaling a warning to proceed with caution. Thus, the body is attributed with a wisdom and sensitivity beyond that of the mind. This concept is vastly popular among hitchhikers, some of whom do have an inclination towards spiritual and nature-centered ways of thinking. Others are not convinced of the carnal wisdom of gut

210 Particularly in Germany. Drivers in many other countries are far less concerned with legality considerations.
instinct, and attribute their reluctance to enter certain cars to rationally discernible indicators for the assessment of risk. This may be the state of the car, the number, gender, and demeanor of passengers, and the overall first impression. Either way, when refusing a lift, most will try not to cause offense or aggression in the drivers and offer some type of excuse. This is most easily done when the hitchhiker has no sign, and always asks the drivers first where they are going. A few seconds of interaction usually suffice to decide whether to accept the lift, or claim that it isn’t helpful. Hitchhikers will generally not decline lifts for reasons of comfort - if they can in any way squeeze in between the dog and the luggage, they will.

3.2.3 Staying Safe

Hitchhiking’s apparently most widespread attribute is ‘dangerous’. Hitchhikers know this, and are in any case constantly reminded of it by others. The specific danger associated with hitchhiking is the risk of falling victim to crime, perpetrated by drivers, in the form of theft, robbery, harassment, assault, rape, or murder. Some suspect the roads to be full of drivers with criminal intent, looking for prey, but more likely these crimes would be born of opportunity and power hierarchy, as the “power to stop and allow access to the automobility system sometimes seems to be understood to also grant other powers.” Hitchhikers’ assessment of their risks is framed by how prepared they see themselves to face them. Any risk perception involves dimensions of knowledge: the more novel and unfamiliar a practice is, the more risky it is perceived. Likewise, the more personal control a person feels they have over a situation, the less risky it appears. Personal competence is therefore key to engaging in a practice in which “[t]he risks are significant, but so are the rewards.”

What is actually the greater safety concern of hitchhikers is their physically vulnerable position in ascape of heavy, accelerated steel machines, both on the roadside and in the car. They take care to hitchhike in places that are safe to stand in, and to be highly visible. They try to identify unsafe drivers, like those under the influence of alcohol or other drugs, and refuse their lift offers. When already riding with them, they will make any excuse to be let out. Thus, reasonably protecting oneself against accidents is a fairly straightforward matter. Protecting oneself against crime is in contrast rather complex, even though there are far fewer criminal people on the road than the general public appears to imagine.

211 BUSCHER; MURRAY; SPEED; TAYLOR; ZAMENOPoulos 2016. p. 7.
In those instances when safety measures were discussed explicitly, it was largely in the context of ‘Female Solo Travel’ workshops, which were designed as safe spaces and as such are subject to a certain degree of confidentiality. Therefore, I will not drag to light here the specifics of what was discussed. Suffice it to say that preparation, language, posture, and poise were argued to be the best weapons. There was agreement that preemptive measures, situational awareness, and knowledge of human nature are more effective in the long run than immediate emergency action. However, appropriate courses of action in acutely threatening situations were also discussed.

Few assaults happen without a prelude, but rather they are prefigured and develop within the social situation in which both parties have a hand to play. Safety is in knowing how situations escalate, and in remaining capable of constructive action in each stage. It starts with being equipped with the appropriate objects of orientation, self-sufficiency, and defense, and with presenting oneself in a way that does not invite misinterpretation of one’s intentions. It further involves developing and trusting one’s gut instinct or instant assessment of drivers, and refusing lifts from persons who do not seem trustworthy, for any reason: “If he’s not looking at my face, I’m not getting in.” It entails being in control of one’s belongings, and keeping at least the most valuable, indispensable objects on the person at all times. Safety lies in the establishment of a positive relationship with drivers, in keeping control of the conversation, and in maintaining orientation. It is in projecting confidence, in being assertive, and in managing the image the other has of one. Most importantly, it lies in recognizing when a situation turns awry in any way. If this is the case, hitchhikers will make up an excuse, ask, or demand to be let out of the car. This is the furthest I have personally ever come down the line. But safety-minded hitchhikers are mentally prepared for further escalation - should the driver refuse to or defer stopping, there are still options. The fetishization of the car means that it, too, can be threatened, by vomit, urine, and fire. Other motorists’ attention can be drawn by throwing things out of windows, and it helps to keep in mind that while driving, the driver is hardly physically superior. Any car can be stopped by pulling the hand-brake, and some hitchers have looked up how one best goes about jumping out of a (slowly) moving car. Finally, many know how to physically defend themselves bodily or with weapons, which may in fact be fairly inconspicuous everyday objects. Safety is thus not an instant action, but a mindset, a process that constantly runs parallel. It is a multi-tiered system of possible courses of action. Safety lies in being aware of the many possi-

214 Comment by a participant of the ‘Female Solo Travel’ workshop, hitchgathering.

215 It is up to the hitcher’s assessment whether causing an accident is more dangerous than staying in the moving car.
ble situations one might find oneself in, in reading the signs to know how to evaluate situations, in tactics of de-escalation, in knowing one’s options, and in being prepared, both mentally and in the form of objects. Hitchhikers aim to recognize the specific situations that are unsafe, instead of regarding the entire practice so. They use strategies to mitigate risks, not eliminate them. Hitchhiking, like life itself, will never be entirely safe, and depending on the specific context and person, hitchers may choose to take more risks, or prioritize safety.

3.2.4 Taking a Lift, Riding with a Stranger

There is a mutual understanding between driver and hitcher that lays out the behavioral norms of both, but leaves many options for the situation to further unfold. Initially, the practice requires “a sense of solidarity, a willingness to share and co-operate as well as an active acceptance of difference that’s not based on assimilation or imposition.” By entering into a relationship “in which the social divisions and boundaries of everyday life are suspended, and new possibilities are given a chance to emerge”, both hitcher and driver take a risk. The situation in the car is atypical in its combination of anonymity and intimacy.

Hitchhiking is a practice in which the “workings of power and hierarchy” can be observed quite clearly, as “these often define the respective positions and attitudes of lift seeker and giver.” Drivers move in their own private and mobile territory, the car. They “control who enters and who is excluded from this little home just as they control who enters their house.” Thus, they are in a position of power, on ‘home ground’ where they make the rules. Hitchhikers in contrast are uprooted and in need of support. They are, however, not entirely powerless. What lends the hitchhiker power is that they may be dependent, but not on any particular driver. They are not defenselessly at the mercy of a driver who would abuse their position, but are flexible and tactical in their mobility and sociality. Additionally, they are much more anonymous than the drivers, who can be identified via their vehicles.

When being picked up, the shift in experience can be drastic. Solitude yields to companionship, stagnancy to movement, marginalization to integration, frustration to hopeful-

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216 Hitchhikers, both novices and experts, do fall victim to crime. There are crimes that could have been avoided with appropriate action, and crimes one couldn’t reasonably protect oneself against. Either way, it regretfully appears necessary to stress that the fault, blame, and responsibility always and exclusively lies with the perpetrator, and never the victim.


ness. I experienced 15 lifts as ‘salvation rides’, as these were offered when I felt particularly down on my luck, desperate, or had been stuck in a desolate place for what felt like a long time. When entering the car, the situation changes dramatically. A few seconds ago, the hitcher was lonesome and suspended in contingency, with no way of knowing how long the wait will be. The solitude was broken when entering the car, and now they find themselves instantly greeted with hospitality and engaged in versant talk with a person they might have never met otherwise. I rode with industrial laborers and business managers, soldiers and pacifists, immigrants and locals, teenagers and seniors, believers and atheists, artists and scientists.


Each relationship, and therefore each ride, is different, and each person involved constructs their presentation of self in relation to what they assume to know of the other, and what they reckon the other to assume of them.

“Being a hitchhiker, […] you are PERMANently social engineering, you see a car stopping, you just look at the car. This is the first information you have. […] Then you get to […] the door, you can see through the window, you see the FACE of the driver. And like, from there, this-this very little information, you don’t KNOW that person. All you know is like, what car he has, and his FACE. And you, and from there you have to know how to relate to him. //uh// Of course if a, if a Rolls Royce stops, with a guy, with a, with a suit //uh// in it, I’m not gonna go like: Hey yo, bro, can you gimme a ride? //umm// But I would definitely do that if it’s a Volkswagen van with like //uh// paint on it and a, and a hippie with a, with a spliff in his mouth in it. And so […] as a hitchhiker, […] it becomes a sort of second nature to like, second-guess people from VERY LITTLE information.”

In the course of a journey, hitchers thus experiment with provisional selves, and may enact fairly different aspects of their identity in each ride. They are likely to make prominent early in the ride that they are hitchhiking voluntarily, as some drivers seem to assume that anyone hitching must be in a dire situation. Some may even offer money, which the hitcher is very likely to refuse.

When riding with strangers, hitchhikers generally avoid any behaviors which might deter them from stopping for future hitchhikers. Their mobility system must be sustained or reproduced continually, and content, trusting drivers are the foundation of this system. This is why hitchhikers are particularly proud of convincing a driver to pick up a hitcher for the first time. On the one hand, it reflects positively on their self-presentation skills. On the other, they have just opened another person up to the idea of stopping for

221 “It’s always very different people, even though many people ask me: So, what kind of people pick you up? Well, you cannot tell, ultimately, everybody picks me up.” Transcript Daniel. p. 57.
222 Transcript Simon. p. 135.
hitchers in general. Hitchhikers thus see themselves as representatives of the imagined community, and take responsibility by performing the practice in a way that makes it sustainable also for others. Hitchers are commonly careful not to breach any rules or norms in the owned space of the car, and to show gratitude. They will generally try their best to be as freshly showered as possible, not to dirty the car, and not to accidentally leave something in the vehicle, or worse: take something. They will offer conversation, sleep or read only when the driver has expressed their disinterest, and smoke or eat only with permission. As a first order of business, most hitchhikers will find agreement on a drop-off point with their drivers, and take their driver’s advice with a grain of salt - many of them haven’t hitched in decades.

**Gift and Exchange**

The relation between driver and hitcher is based on an initial gesture of generosity. While the financial cost of the additional fuel consumption caused by the hitcher’s weight is negligible, the driver is giving up part of their privacy and safety in a gesture they are in no way obliged to. The hitchhiker is thus in debt to the driver, and will try to reciprocate in some way. A gift is hardly ever free, but rather creates an obligation. However, “[r]egular hitchhikers develop a strong sense that they are giving as much as they are taking.”

And indeed, a driver has a lot to gain from a grateful and considerate hitchhiker. The most obvious advantage is company. Many drive alone for long distances and are happy to have somebody there to keep boredom and fatigue at bay, making time pass faster. Hitchers often entertain their drivers with tales of the road, which allows them to live vicariously their adventures. When telling tales for entertainment, mostly it is less important that the story is factually accurate, i.e. ‘true’, but rather that it is entertaining, well told, and engaging: “this kind of talk is playful; it is a way to make conversation more fun.” Additionally, most hitchers will try to make themselves useful in whichever way they can. This may be help in navigating and orientation, or even driving. It may be rolling and lighting cigarettes, opening drinks, or searching and handing objects. Hitchhikers will often offer to share their food, as will drivers, and some carry little gifts as tokens of their gratitude. The driver also gains the satisfaction of having helped someone, and can derive self-worth from this act. It allows them to see themselves as a ‘good person’: a generous, charitable, kind person; and some hitchhikers actively and consciously reinforce this image. Some drivers will themselves emphasize the generosity of

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their act by claiming something along the lines of “You’re lucky I came by, nobody would have picked you up here!” In telling others in their life about helping a stranger, they can access further social recognition. Moreover, drivers have in the hitcher a conversation partner who is unlikely to be inclined to strongly disagree with them. This conformity is on the one hand instrumental, because the hitcher wants to keep the ride, on the other hand related to territory: it is more difficult to challenge somebody’s opinion in their realm. The hitchhiker is also very unlikely to expose the driver’s secrets, and so offers an opportunity for conversations the driver could never have with people in their social environment. Furthermore, many drivers who pick up hitchhikers have received their own fair share of free rides when they were younger, and thus enact a cross-generational reciprocity. Some feel that they owe a general debt and pick up hitchers to ‘pay it forward’. As one of my drivers put it: “I have so much hitchhikers’ debt to pay!” But what is also relevant here is that people are more likely to pick up somebody that they can recognize themselves in, a younger self perhaps.

In sum, by picking up a hitchhiker, drivers can gain an amicable and considerate guest who will reciprocate with companionship, conversation, entertainment, empathy, agreement, and helpfulness. They can derive from the act both self-value and a feeling of paying what is due. And, naturally, they may simply enjoy a pleasant personal encounter, and perhaps learn something new, or gain a new perspective, just as the hitcher does.

**Keeping control**

Many hitchers aim to produce safety by maintaining control of situations, conversations and relationships, preventing them from deteriorating into potentially abusive ones. Following Erving Goffman, the actors have a hand to play in the definition of situations: by acting in a relaxed, self-assured, and nonchalant manner, hitchhikers define the situation as ordinary, non-threatening, and pleasant. Thus, they define their drivers as trustworthy and worthwhile companions, rather than threats. Hitchhikers speak explicitly about the possibilities of exercising psychological control over conversations, keeping them innocuous. Unless a genuinely trustful relation is established, they steer away from topics which may set the stage for harassment, such as sex, or from passionately contentious topics, such as religion. They will not engage in such discussions, but rather give purposely nondescript answers, and change the topic. A driver’s insistence on these topics is read as a warning sign. Hitchers also discuss different character types to deliberately project. Depending on the specific situations, women may for example enact the

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226 See chapter 3.2.2 Waiting: Presenting Oneself.
manner and demeanor of a prim school teacher, a fearless globetrotter, a reputable lady, or any character type that they reckon will gain them respect.

“And sometimes (.) like when you’re, when you’re being picked up by, like, single men, which is, it’s usually like single men[...] I sort of feel like I have to be, present myself as some, like, masculine type of person, so that they (.) become, so that they are not like, attracted to it, or [...] so that I feel safer.”

By projecting a specific identity, hitchers can persuade their drivers to enact certain roles. Hitchhikers often use the communication strategy of altercasting, some intuitively and unwittingly, some deliberately and strategically. Altercasting is defined as “projecting an identity, to be assumed by other(s) with whom one is in interaction, which is congruent with one’s own goals. It is posited as a basic technique of interpersonal control.” While altercasting is mainly applied in advertising, it can be employed in any social situation. It carries the taint of being manipulative, but can be very useful for ensuring the safety and pleasantness of a ride. Through psychological, social and behavioral expectations, a person’s inclination to act out a specific social role is increased. A hitcher may either tell their drivers directly ‘who they are’, or act in certain ways that obligate or entice them to take on specific, often complimentary roles. Examples include saying “You’re a family father, how nice!”, or “You are such a kind and caring person for picking up hitchhikers. Thank you!” Through their position as hitchhikers, they already have a role as being in need of support, thus casting the driver as generous and helpful, which may additionally be made prominent. Drivers will be inclined not to disappoint the expectations invested in them by these evaluations. People usually accept the social roles offered to them quite easily and can in this manner be ‘trapped’ in an appropriate course of action. Note, however, that in projecting one’s being in need of help, it must be avoided to appear altogether helpless. Drivers will often ask hitchers if they aren’t afraid. Fear is a delicate topic of discussion, because it can produce malign social dynamics. Hitchhikers try to answer in a way that makes them appear neither naïve nor afraid. Personally, I usually introduce my pepper spray into the conversation in a way that is purely hypothetical and somewhat conspirative, as if giving up my element of surprise. Thus, what may seem like a simple discussion of safety measures actually accomplishes three things: it turns the conversation away from the topic of fear, it implies to the driver that I trust him, and it lets him (never her) know that I have pepper.

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229 Ibid. p. 454.
spray, while entailing that I see no need to use it against him. Inversely, by being obviously scared, distrustful, helpless, or disoriented, hitchhikers appear vulnerable and cast their drivers as threatening, and themselves as entirely reliant on the driver’s goodwill. Thus, they risk opening up avenues of action to their drivers which may enable them to more easily take advantage of, harass, or abuse their passengers. Women are generally more acutely aware than men of the social dynamics of power and trust that are at play during a ride. They discuss explicitly how to turn these dynamics in their favor, establish positive relationships with their drivers and persuade them to act in a decent, respectful, or even protective manner towards them.

Strategies of Intimacy and Trust

In offering and accepting lifts, drivers and hitchers both take the risk of trusting in a stranger. By enacting and enabling a resistant mobility, they may establish a sense of comradery, as they are accomplices in the questioning of norms. In their initial interactions, both will try to assure the other that their trust is justified. When first entering the car, hitchhikers may offer their name, but I have also spent hours talking to people without ever learning theirs or offering mine. When riding with strangers, the situation is shaped by the ownership of the space, the confinement of the car, the host-guest-relationship, and the physical configuration of being side by side. Eye contact, for example, is minimized. The look between people generates instances of intimacy because “[o]ne cannot take through the eye without at the same time giving”, this produces the “most complete reciprocity” between persons. Eye contact thus facilitates the establishment of trust, but can hardly be achieved while the car is in motion. This means on the one hand that trust must be established through other means, but on the other it facilitates ways of talking that would be harder face to face.

Successful hitchhiking depends to no small degree on the hitcher’s ability to be sociable, entertaining, and likable. Successful relationship management facilitates a pleasant encounter, which can result in longer rides, detours made to ideally position the hitcher for their onward journey, and even guided tours of the area, or invitations for meals or overnight stays. Hitchers and drivers move and dwell together for short, but often intimate periods of time, creating “bonds that are both imagined and felt.” There is often a strange intensity to these short-lived encounters. Their anonymity allows drivers and

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230 So far, it would have made no difference whether or not I factually had pepper spray. I have never once had to take it out.


hitchers to reinvent themselves in relation to each other. The hitchhiker works with flexible identities, and will try not to alienate their drivers, e.g. by using an inappropriate level of sophistication in their language and thus appearing pretentious to less educated persons. Drivers will often confide in the hitchhiker, as people “do not mind exposing their innermost thoughts to strangers because strangers seldom turn informer.” Like bartenders and cabdrivers, hitchhikers are prone to confessions. They offer their drivers an opportunity to unburden themselves from secrets, react with empathy, and then take them with them, never to be seen again. Hitchhikers thus perform emotional labor.

But people do not only feel free to share their secrets with hitchhikers, they also use these opportunities to unleash their unsavory opinions on a captive audience, fishing for agreement. It can make the trip quite uncomfortable, and “it illustrates the way power relations can operate within the ‘owned’ space of the vehicle, that home away from home.” Male hitchhikers report being invited to join into misogynist rants time and again, and I have myself met my fair share of xenophobes. It is an explicit topic of discussion among hitchhikers how to best deal with such situations. But the choice of whether to fiercely object and lose the ride, attempt to discuss rationally, or feign vague agreement is up to each hitchhiker to make.

Dealing with the many different characters and situations requires a good deal of tact and sensibility. Not every person reacts the same way, so it’s a matter of diplomacy and finesse, awareness and empathy to establish respectful relationships, give trust where it is due, and be aware where it is not. It involves deliberate image work and careful reading of people and situations on both sides of the interaction for strangers to become *intimately mobile*. Ideally, and in most cases, this results in sound relationships where both parties mirror each other as worthwhile companions who merit trust, respect, and empathy. It is not uncommon for a hitchhiker to be given phone numbers, business cards, or other contact addresses at the end of the lift. Occasionally, the personal encounters and experiences made are perceived by hitchers to be serendipitous, as if the whole journey had proceeded in just the way it did to deliver them to the right place at the right time to be picked up by this particular person.

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234 GARNER 2008 a. p. 15.
3.2.5 Staying Sane Over the Long Haul

Hitchhikers are consistently “locked in negotiation, cooperation and conflict with the dominant rationality visibly inscribed on the scapes”, which is why they “become adept at near constant tactical and improvisory performances”\textsuperscript{236}. The toll that this conflict and improvisation can take on the hitcher’s psyche during prolonged hitchhiking is a marginal topic of discussion at best. Experiences of exhaustion hardly feature in the interviews, and also in informal conversation they were seldom mentioned. I suspect that this is connected on the one hand to my own disposition, and on the other to the fact that the events I visited celebrate the benefits of the practice, and discussing the wear and strain of it detracts from this without offering a good story. The safety risks of hitching are addressed head-on, but they are also a significant aspect in the discussion of the practice outside of the community, and offer opportunities for representations of one’s bravery, rebelliousness, ingenuity, and understanding of human nature. The hitchhiker is confronted with safety risks from the outside, they are external to the person and can be overcome. The mental toll of hitchhiking is internal, and reveals personal limits. In the subsequent paragraphs, some of the peculiar modes of experience that go along with hitching beyond one’s tolerance will be discussed, as I experienced the practice’s mental and emotional trials and tribulations intensely. Speaking to other hitchhikers about this has brought me to the conclusion that, while undoubtedly every hitchhiker has experienced something similar, the severity depends on personality, attitude, and the time restrictions of the journey. Not every person is equally susceptible to feelings of ostracization and mental exhaustion, and the degree to which persons feel themselves to belong to ‘society’ to begin with also varies. But what significantly shaped my experience of many journeys were the time restrictions that I imposed on them because I felt it necessary to be in certain places at certain times. I underestimated the toll and overestimated my tolerance and stamina. I thus allowed myself only few and short breaks, and hitchhiked almost continuously for multiple consecutive days. Most experienced hitchhikers try to avoid such restrictions and allow ample time for breaks.

Hitchhikers have to contend with uncertainty and contingency, they do not know when their next lift will come, and who will offer it. It helps to imagine that the car that the hitcher is going to ride in is already on its way, unbeknownst to the driver. The right mindset is one of unwavering optimism, of being prepared to ‘go with the flow’ and accept anything that life throws at one. It includes confidence in one’s capability to cope with adversity, and in the rightfulness of one’s position and actions. But the constant

\textsuperscript{236} O’Regan 2013. p. 42.
exposure to gazes, the anticipation and boredom of waiting, and the strenuous effort of connecting to numerous people wear down one’s mental resources. The right mindset cannot indefinitely be sustained. However, I found this strain to be much more manageable in the company of another hitcher.

While signaling for a lift, hitchhikers are constantly exposed to the automobile drivers’ gaze. The effect of this should not be underestimated. Experienced hitchhikers do develop a certain immunity to it, but how one is affected depends on personality. Personally, I felt this gaze acutely, and it grated on me most when I was exhausted from the sustained performance of hitching. While there are commonly numerous instances of friendly micro-interactions with passing drivers, a lot of reactions are far from encouraging. Many of those passing by will simply look at hitchhikers with mild bemusement, offhand curiosity, or unperturbed boredom. Many stare unabashedly, and a few have taken photos of me as casually as if I were a zoo animal. Already more unsettling are looks of shock and exasperation, and flagrant mockery, but what can really make a lone hitcher question their actions is seeing indignation and disgust in the faces passing by. Sometimes, although fairly seldom, this is paired with acts of aggression, such as disrespectful gestures, yelling, honking, engine-roaring, or throwing trash.


Hitchhiking is an act of questioning norms, and a highly visible and vulnerable one, in which passersby are asked to make themselves accomplice. But some choose instead to sanction the perceived transgression, or to exploit the hitcher’s vulnerability to feel powerful. The “shame of being a hitchhiker” can in part be overcome through practice and the accumulation of positive experiences, wherein strangers reacted positively and thus normalized the practice, and through interactions with, and knowledge about, other hitchhikers. The formation of a community and the knowledge about this community allows hitchhikers to identify with it. Thus, instead of experiencing the inevitable marginalization as being ostracized, outside of a collective, the community offers a different collective to identify with. This adjustment in the frame of reference allows the lone hitchhiker, to a certain degree, to stay convinced that what they’re doing is perfectly fine and normal enough. It is the drivers who don’t pick up hitchers, then, who don’t understand.

237 “I was hitching out of Saarbrücken, and as I was standing there, somebody turned into the road on the other side and immediately yelled at me: ‘Oi, get a job!’ [...] And I get the middle finger time and again.” Transcript Daniel. p. 74.
238 Transcript Simon. p. 133.
But prolonged exposure occasionally put me into a strange mental place, and I tried to find different outlets for this mental pressure. If at all possible, I sang loudly and madly, or discharged a spew of profanity, or I released my stream of consciousness into hateful improvised poetry about the place and the gazes I had come to despise. But for each new approaching car, I dutifully performed my role of pleasant and complacent hitchhiker as best I could. However, I have a finite tolerance for disappointment. Two of my journeys included a breaking point hours before arrival that saw me reduced to tears, sobbing miserably and publicly, after having my hopes for a lift raised and then crushed shortly thereafter. Each of these moments occurred during a long wait after difficult and prolonged hitching with strong feelings of ostracization. They were each followed by collecting myself, calming down and eventually finding another lift. What may at some point have been experienced as liberty can through the drivers’ reactions turn into crushing solitude. Standing alone by the roadside, lost and placeless in a sprawling network one doesn’t belong in (or so one is made to feel), waiting for the moment of grace when one may be included again in the society of humans through the kindness of a stranger.

And then they come, and they stop as if it was the most normal thing in the world, unaware of the emotional turmoil within the externally composed hitcher they encounter. It is an almost religious experience to be picked up after a dire wait. Hitchhikers occasionally speak about it in religious terms as well. They are weary wanderers, either damned or in purgatory, when a savior or a saint or an angel comes along to deliver salvation through their divine grace. They are absolved of their sin of being carless in a motorscape, and are then taken from the desert to the promised land, the next gas station. I usually experienced getting to a new location as a resetting of the clock, a fresh new slate. But of course I carried my exhaustion with me. One night, arriving at a rest area near Hamburg long past midnight after a grueling journey, I note:

“I strut across the parking lot like I own the place. I feel invincible. I am the queen of this service area, I have conquered it. I sit on my backpack brazenly, legs astride, smoking a cigarette of victory. People muster me unsurely, some with pity, as if I must be in dire straits to be hanging around a gas station alone at night, but they do not offer me a way out. I don’t feel any emergency. I feel fantastic! I don’t have the problem, but the privilege of being here now. I earned it with sweat and tears.

239 In the first instance, a man had enthusiastically agreed to taking me along after drinking coffee with his passengers, but when they emerged from the gas station, the offer was curtly retracted under the disdainful eyes of the passengers. In the second instance, a novice hitcher I had had several friendly conversations with over the course of our prolonged wait, and who was going the same way as I, jumped into a lift he was finally offered without so much as looking back at me, let alone ask for a ride on my behalf.
Returning home from this journey and another one, I arrived past 3am in a state of mental disarray, crazed with exhaustion, emotional strain, and sensual overload. It took me several days to recuperate and return to everyday life. I had clearly overdone it, and suffered the consequences.

All hardships of hitchhiking add to the feeling of challenge and ultimately achievement, and can instill in the hitchhiker a feeling of heroism. The catastrophic scope of failures and negative experiences are a matter of perspective, and a lack of time restrictions allows for spontaneity and flexibility, reducing stress and weariness. Hitchhikers learn to estimate their own resilience, and to plan their trips accordingly.

3.2.6 Arriving

A hitchhiking journey is highly fragmented and can be very inconvenient. It is characterized by emotional highs and lows, boredom and excitement, marginalization and integration. It includes moments of adversity and challenge, the overcoming of which through one’s own ingenuity and perseverance produces an immense sense of achievement and pride. Hitchhikers enact their mobility skillfully, tactically, and knowledgeably. The technique and skill that they have embodied and enacted includes knowing how to prepare for and plan a journey, how to anticipate drivers’ perceptions, inclinations, and dispositions, how to sustain an appropriate mindset, how to maintain their physical intactness, how to present themselves to others, and how to react flexibly to change. Thus, upon arriving at their destination, hitchhikers do not feel that they were simply lucky to have traversed the distance safely and with reasonable speed, but rather that they have worked and earned their passage. Of course, a novice hitchhiker may extend their thumb without being aware of any of these techniques and have a wonderful journey without encountering any of the problems, dangers, and adversities discussed here. But in that case they would have simply been lucky, and experienced hitchhikers would rather rely on their own skill than on fortunate circumstance.

Some hitchhikers, particularly the athletically- or analytically-minded, keep minute logs of all their journeys. After completion of a trip, they will operationalize their journey and rate their performance, calculating average speed, distance, and waiting times and registering anything from drivers’ gender and nationality, car brands, and top speeds to borders crossed and hitchhiking locations used. In chronicling and publishing their jour-

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240 Field diary, August 9th, 2015. pp. 275f.
neys online\textsuperscript{241}, they build a base of data which can be used to more broadly understand and contextualize people’s hitchhiking experiences. In this way, the phenomenon can be quantified, and statistics generated about average speeds and waiting times, the frequency of negative experiences, and the general hitchability of different places. By logging their journeys in these databases, hitchhikers contribute to making these statistics more significant and representative, and also allow others to gain a sense of their experiences along certain routes. Many will also mark and rate the locations they hitched from on hitchwiki or other sites, thus continuously expanding the hitchhikers’ shared resources. But publishing one’s journeys also enables recognition and esteem by their peers, and permits comparison between hitchhikers. In each log, it can be determined who has solicited the most rides, and who has hitchhiked the furthest and the fastest.

Hitchhikers find it liberating to know that they could just make the decision to go at any moment, and be a thousand kilometers away within a day, without spending a dime. They draw satisfaction from the feeling that this liberty is granted by their own competence. The spatial radius hitchhikers feel they have is vast, and the entire land around them appears to them as a scape of opportunity, filled with auspicious roads stretching in every direction.

4. From Hitchhiking to Being Hitchhikers

So far, it has been discussed why and how people take up the practice of hitchhiking, become increasingly dexterous in it, and how experienced hitchers perform it, exhibiting expertise and skill. Subsequently, the focus will be on how people assume the identity of hitchhiker, which is a process that runs parallel to accumulating practical expertise, but is additionally marked by seeking to belong to the community of hitchhikers.

“[O]nce individuals seek to belong to the scapes, they must master certain kinds of practical action which derive from moving within, amongst and between the particular social relations and practices available to them.”\textsuperscript{242}

Becoming a hitchhiker encompasses more than just a mastery of hitchhiking: it includes personal connection to members of the community, and the assumption of, or development of an opinion about, certain perceptions, attitudes, and values held by the community.

Just as each person moves in multiple social circles, and enacts different roles in each of them, they are also members of several communities of practice. People may behave differently in each of them, construct different aspects of their selves, and gain different

\textsuperscript{241} E.g. at hitchlog.com [last accessed July 15th, 2016].
\textsuperscript{242} O’REGAN 2013. p. 39.
perspectives. This continual negotiation of ‘self’ may produce intra-personal tensions as well as instabilities within the community, but it also facilitates “a sense of agency through the adoption and adaptation of different forms of participation and identity construction within different communities.” Hitchhikers may also be members of professional communities of practice, or of those revolving around leisure activities, hobbies, and crafts. A significant overlap seems to exist between the community of practice of hitchhikers, and those of dumpster divers, squatters, nomadic travelers, and human (particularly migrant) rights, environmental, and animal rights activists.

As has been shown, while from an outside perspective hitchhiking appears to be characterized by dependency, unpredictability, and risk, hitchhikers feel that they have a great measure of control over their mobility, and are tremendously proud of this. Hitchhiking’s turbulence and friction are significant, but so are the experiences of kindness, connection, and liberty. People voluntarily face the practice’s tribulations time and again, because they feel that the benefits far outweigh the drawbacks. It becomes to them much more than just a way to move, to overcome physical distance. Instead, the practice is attributed “with the potential to affect, develop, and transform the self.”

“Developing an identity as a member of a community and becoming knowledgeable skillful are part of the same process, with the former motivating, shaping, and giving meaning to the latter, which it subsumes.”

Through participation in a community, a newcomer engages in that community’s practice in a way that encompasses an understanding, but possibly also an adaptation and transformation, of “various tools, language, role-definitions and other explicit artefacts as well as various implicit relations, tacit conventions, and underlying assumptions and values.” In developing an identity as hitchhiker, individuals alter the way they view and understand themselves, and are regarded and recognized by others. The construction of an identity as hitchhiker became possible only after it had become a signifying practice, associated with particular lifestyles and value systems. Before the 1960s, “[h]itchhiking did not make one a hitchhiker; practice did not lead to identity.” But even after the 1960s, and until today, not every person who thumbs a ride and thus embodies the role of hitchhiker also assumes the identity, and aspires to belong to the community. While there are plenty of people who engage in the practice, and plenty

244 Clark; Fincham; Handley; Sturdy 2006. p. 650.
245 O’Regan 2012. p. 137.
247 Clark; Fincham; Handley; Sturdy 2006. p. 645.
who do so skillfully and successfully, their engagement is not the same as participation in the community of practice.

The fact that the majority of community related ethnographic data has been collected at the hitchgathering has its implications for this work, but in a prolific way, given that it is Europe’s major event in terms of scale, range, and participation. As this is the event most likely to attract those hitchhikers with the strongest personal engagement in and commitment to the community, which is for most no longer imagined but actualized in personal relationships, and who regard the practice not as a form of mobility but as a lifestyle, and the term ‘hitchhiker’ not as a description of a momentarily enacted role but as an identity, it can be considered the crystallization point of European hitchhikerdom, and of the community formed around it.

4.1 Hitchhiking as Education

Many research participants referred to their experiences as transformative of personality, attitudes, and world view. The practice is thus something of a school of life, where the hitcher is confronted with challenging situations and intimate encounters with strangers from all walks of life. It brings one face to face with the multiplicity of human nature and opinion, and compels one to find common ground with all of them.

“That’s (. ) that’s the main reason, for me. I just /uh/ pledge for hitchhiking, because when I think about, like my life so far, [...] I think (. ) the most important things, I really learned like while hitchhiking.”

The development of personality through regular hitchhiking can encompass a number of facets. Hitchhiking brings people to the realization of their own capability, and is thus a source of confidence, self-assurance, and personal autonomy. The practice can liberate the traveler not only from time tables, fixed destinations, and financial expenditure, but also from fears and anxieties about strangers, money, and time:

“Hey, I’m here without a purpose anyway, so. You know, if I can like, free some, some of my like (. ) habits or conditions or like, you know, judgments of other people or, you know, free myself from fear of strangers or something [...] Like, the hitchhiking was a perfect way to do this, so- [...] From car to car it [...] can be a completely different experience. And, you don’t know where you’re gonna get dropped off and you don’t know where you’re gonna sleep [...]. Having everything set out and [...] you know, booking a hostel ahead [...] this sort of idea (. ) had to be dropped. And so it’s like, you’re living much more (. ) moment to moment and not thinking about the future so much. [...] It brought me into, like a feeling of being very much present, like, rather than thinking all the time. And also (. ) on the same hand (. ) /uh/ because you-you jump (. ) out of one car (. ) you were just having this conversation with someone (. ) and then, then they’re gone. You know, you’re never gonna see them again. Even though it might have been an AMAZing, amazing conversation, amazing connection, you know. And [...] there is, like a tendency to (. ) like in, in sort of like, normal world, to (. ) like,

249 Transcript Hannah. p. 118.
make that important and special and hold on to it. [...] But then you jump out of that car and (.) ten minutes later you jump into another car, and make (.) a DIFFerent connection with a different person, different conversation. (.) And it forces you to be THERE and THEN, not thinking about the previous car and thinking about like, the amazing con-conversation you had. You-you’re then in a NEW moment and so, [hitchhiking] brought me into the present moment, and being more conscious of, like, and aware of (.) like, where I am now, here, not thinking about (.) yesterday or not thinking about tomorrow.”

It thus allows them to become more flexible, more spontaneous, and more serene, it is “an exercise of letting go.” It enables people to break out of their all too often homogenized social circles, and teaches not only an awareness of the diversity of humanity, but also diplomacy in encountering it, and encourages the dissolution of prejudices. Hitchhiking facilitates mutual learning, or at least learning to appreciate another’s point of view, and stimulates interest in cultures and languages. It furthers the development of a sense of intuition, and strengthens practitioners’ ability of reading people. It may change the way the hitcher looks at the world:

“I have the feeling that (.) //uh// hitchhiking is in some way empowering (.) you, because it (.) it, you know, like, we live in a world where everybody tells us there’s nothing to do, it’s a shit, just pff let it go as it is and go on with your shitty job and (.) there’s nothing you can do which can help. And //uh// hitchhiking [...] is already a first step to, towards //uh// (.) like, learning that you can change something in, in this world. That, with your everyday actions (.) there’s a way to [...] re-appropriate the world which is around you in a way that is more (.) ethical for you, and more (.) just, more, that feels better to you. [...] There’s so many people who hate (.) the routine of (.) //uh// subway, work, sleeping and, you know. And who just want something else, doesn’t have to be for political reasons.”

Hitchhiking can in this way empower people. It also has the potential of confronting the hitchhiker with who they think they are, and of making them more emphatic and sensitive, and more clement in their encounters with those they find objectionable:

“I used to be, and I still am actually, //uh// what one could call a truth junky. //uh// I-I hate, I hate things like hypocrisy, which everybody hates, right? But like, even politeness, like I-I-I don’t like being polite to people, [...] I do the min-the EXTREme minimum, you know, [...] I try to avoid being, being a sociopath. [...] But being a hitchiker is the opposite of this. Being a hitchiker, [...] you are PERMANently social engineering, [...] And so [...] as a hitchiker, [...] it becomes a sort of second nature to like, second-guess people from VERY LITTLE information. Which is the opposite of what I always wanted. You know like, I’ve always wanted to like //uh// behave the same way with everyone and be myself. And //uh// and-and-and when you get a ride with, with racists, [...] and then the guy says [...] ‘All the gypsies are-are thieves’ and, and //umm// (.) and, and you-you-you listen to him and you-you kind of relate to him and (.) and you AGREE with him, you know like, you’ve heard his story, you understand him, you agree with him, and then you get out of the car and you’re like: No, actually, I don’t agree with him. But //uh// but you PLAY that, that role, you’re an actor, you’re a LIAR. [...] I’ve, I’ve started developing a sort of [...] WAY of //uh// of, of being nice to people, of SEEMing nice to people, that-that people will LIKE me more, because this is your CURRENCY as a
hitchhiker. And //umm// (...) and it's //umm// (...) in particular for someone like me, that was so obsessed about like, ALWAYS being yourself, and always (...) telling what you have [...] on your heart and on your mind. [...] I mean, it-it should, it should, it should //uh// [...] it should BREAK my program, right? Because //umm// (...) and I don't know how it hasn't. //uh// (...) I've become more, more of a (...) I've become more interested in people's feelings (...) rather than [...] what people have to say. [...] I've become more //umm// (...) //umm// sensitive, [...] listening, not only just to what people SAY, but to-TO HOW they say it and (...) it, in a way it has softened me, you know like, because the person I was before was (...) a pretty hard person. (...) I am still that person and //umm// I'm, I'm really intolerant of //umm// of MANY things and (...) and //uh// if someone is-is a kind of person I don't wanna spend time with, I'm just gonna leave, you know, but-. (...) //umm// (...) Hitchhiking doesn't necessarily make you a better person, (...) but //uh// yeah, more often than not it will. It will make you //umm// a more (...) it will increase your ability to listen, and, at least that's what it did to me. And to //uh// to empathize (...) with other people. (...) Though you do meet people around here that are not very good at listening, so I'm not sure it works with everyone.253

It is hard to determine in which particular cases the practice has transformed the practitioner, thus teaching them certain dispositions and personality traits, and in which cases the hitchhiker has been attracted to and ensnared by the practice precisely because they already held these dispositions. In any case it seems clear that those who neither have nor gain these traits are unlikely to hitchhike extensively, and unlikely to seek out the community.

4.2 The Hitchhiking Community

The foundation of the hospitality exchange network Hospitality Club, or alternatively that of hitchwiki254, is commonly referred to by hitchers as a marker of the temporal divide between the era of individuals hitchhiking, and the evolvement of a hitchhiking culture, community, and identity. Previously, there were few resources to access the knowledge of earlier generations, and thus hardly any agreed-upon techniques:

“...It was a pretty interesting time of experimenting. Eventually like, I connected to the, to the rest of the crowd and (...) and people told me: Yeah, no man. Hitchhike the highways, man, you can make like a thousand kilometers a day. WHAT??”255

It was neither obvious nor inevitable for a community to form, as hitchhiking is a practice usually performed alone. Communities are one’s loci of belonging, and the arenas in which people gain their most fundamental and substantial experience of social life outside of the home.256 The attitudes, values, and practices, and therefore the collective identity of a community, which shapes its internal social life, are not predefined or ex-

253 Transcript Simon, pp. 135f.
254 Founded in 2000 and 2005, respectively.
255 Transcript Simon. p. 127.
ternal. Rather, it is a collective enterprise, as is to some extend the construction of individuals’ identities within the context of the community. It is

“only partly a matter of an individual’s sense of self, biography, and substance. The construction of identity is also a way of speaking of the community’s constitution of itself through the activity of its practitioners.” 257

The development of community identity is shaped by the larger social environments in which it competes with other communities offering different constructions of meaning:

“They only ‘need’ to formulate a sense of themselves as coherent and distinctive because they confront others. Moreover, just as other cultures are only observable from the perspective of a culture from which it is contrasted, so also people see their own culture from the supposed vantage point at which they imagine others to view it.” 258

The hitchhiking community’s mark of distinction from others, and signifier of consistence within, is their skillful mobility practice. Hitchhikers share a “sense of familiar space” produced by “[r]oads, their inhabitants, materialities, infrastructure as well as the opportunities, means and constraints they offer”. 259 They also share the cosmopolitan dispositions and the mastery of the body that are requirements for successfully navigating this space, and furthermore the experiences of living, even temporarily, “a marginal life outside of the expectations, [and] economic, political, behavioural codes”. 260

They mutually recognize each other as legitimate participants in the community of practice on the basis of these shared qualities, which does not entail necessarily accordance or conformity, but rather enables them to negotiate meanings. 261

“But, if you look into another hitchhikers’ eyes /uh/, it’s a kind of mirror, also. Because you have a lot of things in common and you understand /uh/ (.) each other and you have the same idea, like, you know what to do when you hit the road”. 262

A community of practice is not static, but open to transformation from within, which is often initiated by newcomers and implemented as they move from peripheral positions to more central ones. The hitchgathering, for example, has changed tremendously over the years, abandoning its original purpose of drawing public attention and instead becoming a space where hitchhikers can be among themselves, secluded from the world. At the same time, it has become more politicized, a space where people try to spread awareness of various issues, share knowledge about political theory and action, and make distinct efforts towards sustainability. But community does not have the same

260 Ibid. p. 140.
261 See WENGER 1998. p. 56.
262 Transcript Peter. p. 25.
meanings for all of its members. While it may present itself to the outside as being largely homogenous,

“‘[c]ommunity’ can no longer be adequately described in terms of institutions and components, for now we recognize it as a symbol to which its various adherents impute their own meanings. They can all use the word, all express their co-membership of the ‘same’ community, yet all assimilate it to the idiosyncrasies of their own experiences and personalities.”

Being an old timer or full participant in this community of practice can encompass a number of tasks in which responsibility for the community and its representation is assumed. This includes the organization and equipment of races and gatherings, speaking and presenting at conferences, festivals, and other events, and conducting public relations. It further comprises taking responsibility for online networks as coder or administrator, and contributing to hitchwiki and other shared resources. Further community tasks are the publication of texts and images in the form of zines, books, weblogs, or other media, the production of videos, and the creation of other materials, such as stickers.

While hitchhiking used to be strongly associated with adolescence, and mostly abandoned in the early twenties at the latest, it seems today that the age span has shifted. This could be connected on the one hand with the heightened perception of risk, as many parents would try to prevent their teenage children from hitchhiking if they can, but it also doesn't appear to be a culturally available option for many adolescents. The contemporary extension of youth, the time before one is socially expected to become a ‘proper’ adult and refrain from certain behaviors, may also have facilitated this shift. But anyway, reaching milestones of adulthood has not deterred some of the gathering participants from continuing to hitchhike: some own cars, are married, or have children, which they even took on extended hitchhiking journeys from infant age.

**4.2.1 Finding the Others - Races and Gatherings**

Hitchhikers’ gatherings and races bring together experienced, networked hitchhikers and novices, and offer a platform for community building through storytelling, communal eating, sharing of information and skills, identifying areas of agreement, and experiencing togetherness. They are events that “mak[e] an online community into a real community”. The term community does not necessarily imply “co-presence, a well-defined, identifiable group or socially visible boundaries”, but rather “participation in an

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264 See e.g. RINZOLUCI 1974, MUKERJI 1978.
265 See CHERSTERS; SMITH 2001. p. 3.
266 Transcript Naomi. p. 147.
activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means for their lives and for their communities.\(^{267}\) However, a network can only function if it is intermittently ‘activated’ through the occasioned co-presence of its members\(^{268}\), as this “renders persons uniquely accessible, available, and subject to one another.”\(^{269}\) It is necessary for sustaining trust and commitment that will have to persist while the members of the community are dispersed for prolonged periods of time. Meetings, thus, “are often unmissable, obligatory and make or perform the network in question.”\(^{270}\) They are the basis of the “emotive impact of community, the capacity of empathy and affinity”\(^{271}\), which cannot arise out of an imagined community alone. Rather, it is born from the dynamic interaction between that concept and its realization in the form of face-to-face relationships:

> “People care because they associate the idea of community with people they know, with whom they have shared experiences, activities, places and/or histories. In turn, they use these interpersonal relations to interpret their relationship to more extended social categories.”\(^{272}\)

Part of the activity that any community must engage in to persist is the organization of its own reproduction.\(^{273}\) People are unlikely to hitchhike all their life, so the community needs to attract new members if it is to prevail in the long run. But hitchhikers do not only aim to sustain their numbers, but rather to multiply them. Hitchhiking associations specifically name as one of their goals the promotion of the practice so that it may gain in popularity. And gatherings are based on the premise that the more hitchers there are,

> “the more likely parents, educators, authorities, the media and drivers can overcome potential psychological barriers and social distrust, since fear once visited on the practice is difficult to eliminate.”\(^{274}\)

The races and gatherings are thus organized in a way that makes it easy for novice hitchhikers interested in community involvement to participate. Many hitchhikers reported finding little support for their uptake of the practice from friends and family, even if their parents had themselves hitchhiked extensively:

> “My Mum has been saying it’s really dangerous. […] My Dad said: ‘Oh, no one does that anymore!’ And, it’s not dead. It isn’t dead. I think we should keep it alive! (laughs)”\(^{275}\)

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\(^{267}\) LAVE; WENGER 1991. p. 98.


\(^{270}\) LARRY 2007. p. 231. [emphasis in original].


\(^{272}\) AMIT 2002. p. 18.


For many, the races serve as a gateway into a further exploration of the practice: the perceived security of an organizational frame, the experienced normalization through other hitchhikers, and the matching of inexperienced hitchers and more knowledgeable ones into teams lower the threshold and ease insecurities and shame. If the race is in a charitable context, novices may find it easier to justify their position in the face of social adversity. Races allow newcomers to establish a feel for and connection to hitchhiking and its practitioners in an organized setting. While the races appear superficially to be a competitive activity, in reality few of the participants take them very seriously. Most are primarily interested in taking part, mingling with other hitchhikers, and having an out-of-the-ordinary experience. The rules, or rather the code of honor, cannot strictly be enforced, as the only way for organizers to find out that a team has cheated is usually if they declared it themselves. Still, participants seem to have no interest in fraudulently winning, as there is little more to gain than a lonely wait and the questionable satisfaction of receiving ill-achieved recognition from their peers. Those who arrive late often have had the more interesting experience.

At this point, the transformative effects of hitchhiking, and the role of storytelling in community events will be in focus, before contrasting the specific four events that I participated in during this research.

**Lifestyle Change**

One of the motivations to seek out and participate in alternative events like the hitchgathering appears to be an aspired or actualized change in lifestyle, and a desire to meet and learn from others who have oriented themselves towards alternative ways of living.

“Und deswegen wollt ich das auch ruhig mal-mal so kennenlernen und mal mitmachen, weil ich mittlerweile selber auch in meinem Leben [...] seit einiger Zeit schon so’n (.) Wandel habe, in dem ich halt auch darauf achte, sehr nachhaltig zu leben (.) und auch, ja //ehm// umweltbewusst und so weiter, überhaupt bewusst zu leben. //ehm// und deswegen wollte ich das mal kennenlernen, mal in so ne, in so ne //ehm// SZene mal wirklich mittendrin so zu sein, einfach mal so zu gucken, wie das hier so abgeht.”

An occupation with hitchhiking often seems to overlap with a growing interest and engagement in other nonconforming practices and attitudes. Take-up of the practice, and

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275 Transcript Leah. p. 49 & pp. 52f.

276 “And that’s why I wanted to get to know this and take part in it, because by now I have myself had a change in my life for some time, in which I have been mindful to live very sustainably, and also environmentally consciously and so on, to live consciously in general. And that’s why I wanted to get to know this, to be really in the middle of this scene, just to see what’s up here.” Transcript Daniel, pp. 59f.
contact to the community, is in many cases “constitutive of a transformative way of thinking about moving, dwelling and communicating.”

“...it’s not the first gathering for me, I, I have (. .) many like, thoughts and doubts after it. So, by being here, you very often like change your approach, or change your priorities, or you may be just (. .) it’s enough if you start questioning them, like (. .) normal things that you do in your life, why do-why you do them, and if they make any sense. Like something which is considered normal in society, you start questioning it, and it’s really good that you do that, because (. .) yeah, it makes you wiser, it makes you happier.”

Hitchhiking encourages reciprocal altruistic interaction “since it foregrounds informal (and frequently marginal) sets of social relations based on mutual aid, cooperation and trust.” It therefore serves as an example for interactions in other domains of life, and opens practitioners up to the ideas of fulfilling their needs through different exchanges, and “chang[ing] [their] interactions away from monetary ones.” Hitchhikers thus come into contact with the gift economy, in which goods and acts are not exchanged directly, but given away freely under the supposition that the receiver will pass the gift on to another person, like past hitchhikers give lifts, or in some other form. Hitchhiking also facilitates awareness of resources that go unused, as the hitcher comes to see a car without passengers not just as one person moving, but also as four seats being wasted. The practice thus has a logical continuation in other interstitial practices that make use of that which is wasted or unused. Engaging in such activities does not only change how people see themselves, how they construct their identities in relation to the world, but also “the way they represent the world to themselves.”

“...And //uh// and it was for me like a (. .) an important moment of my life. It’s, it was the time when I discovered dumpster diving, with those people. I discovered (. .) it was the first time I slept in a squat. //uh// It was the first time I (. .) I had an intimate relationship with a, with a man. It was really many many things together. And //uh// to me then, hitchhiking was kind of a, an entry door for all those difference, different //uh// (. .) ways of life, and also political //uh// acknowledgements (. .) maybe, yeah. (. .) And (. .) so it went on, I kept on hitchhiking on my own, a little bit more. //uh// And basically it’s hitchhiking, too, who made me (. .) take the decision of kicking my (. .) myy, my studies, in medicine [...] because I just realized that I could hitchike, I could dumpster dive, I could //uh// sleep in a tent, I could be hosted by people everywhere, I could live without money basically. So for the first time-time I told to myself: Okay, maybe I don’t need to work, I don’t need to study, I can just take my time to (. .) explore the world and (. .) give some answers to some questions that I always put (. .) away, you know? [...] And
so I left. I did a lot of wwoofing, I discovered the countryside, too. (...) And //uh// discovered all the rest of //uh// I would say (.) yeah, like, being yourself, I discovered it, like that. I discovered-about my culture, I discovered //uh// squats, I discovered rainbow gatherings, I discovered //uh// political camps, international political camps, which are SO different from //uh// the political engagement I, I had before in my (.) in my hometown. [...] And then I discovered there are some international networks of activist, who are (.) fighting for different values. (.) I don't know if it's (.) how I can describe all those values (laughs). But of-, I don't know (.) people who (.) who are really thinking about all the domination systems that happen in the world, who try to be aware of it, and to make things to, to opposite. People who try to fight sexism, really. People who try to fight against //uh// economical //uh// how do you say? Unfairness in the world. Against racism, (.) against big //uh// //umm// like big pollution projects. So, yeah it was the open door for me too, to this world, too. Which is //uh// now the world I'm living in."  

In hitchhiking to gatherings, people seek access to this alternative world, they synchronize their maneuvers and become part of a larger performance, “one that allows participants to construct and communicate their belonging to an alternative life trajectory.”  

The hitchgathering and nomads’ gathering have the advantage of being comparatively easily accessible and open platforms for learning about alternative ways of life. There is little expectation of previous knowledge about and consciousness of social, political, and environmental issues and activist codes and actions, as opposed to e.g. no-border camps, or other expressly activist camps.

**Storytelling**

Storytelling is a performance that allows individuals to narrate their own identity and demonstrate an appropriate understanding of what the community is about. While at the hitchgathering there was also a distinct workshop for the purpose of storytelling, it was of course not limited to this instance. Storytelling is all around at the gatherings and races. Telling tales from the road helps the hitchhikers to make sense of, and shape their understanding of the things that happen to them, and frame them within a community fabric. It communicates who they want to be, and how they want to perceive the world. Storytelling also offers a platform for recognition, validation, and socialization of the hitchhiker: “The worldly hitchhiker has enough guts, daring, endurance and friends to ‘make it’ on the road.” It allows them to assert themselves and demonstrate belonging by invoking the shared experiential scape:

“The distinct forms of sociability and encounters with drivers, long waiting times, places visited and hospitality exchanged create the shared experiences of movement which are central to the physical gatherings and online discussion boards.”

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283 Transcript Jacob, pp. 100f.
In telling a good story, the hitchhiker may demonstrate their sociality, and map out their worldly adeptness and cosmopolitanism, both in terms of perambulated territory, and in the range of human encounters, from threat to warmest hospitality. They thus demonstrate globality, a form of cultural capital that is based on cosmopolitan competence, expressed in a capacity to connect with many places and peoples, and a command of intercultural knowledge and transnational networks.\textsuperscript{287} Since most of these stories have no witnesses, “[t]he storyteller is free to manipulate the details of that event to make it a better story.”\textsuperscript{288} The shared experience and knowledge of hitchhiking in the community eliminates the need to talk about normal, common situations. As everybody has experienced these, only the extraordinary is worth talking about. This includes remarkable fortune and misfortune, hardship, fear, and danger, but also trust, serendipity, connection, and hospitality. Novices in part learn to be hitchhikers through the dispositions and perceptions expressed in old timers’ stories, and through learning to tell a good hitchhiking story themselves. I noted that the young and enthusiastic novices are occasionally somewhat unable to express their experiences, resorting simply to common phrases such as “It was lots of fun!”, “They were great people!”, or “That was awesome!” They speak about the practice differently than old timers, also in the interviews. While novices narrated anecdotally their specific experiences, old timers spoke more of ideas and concepts related to the practice.

**Juxtaposition of Events**

Hitchhiking events are organized in different ways, and have different characteristics. Several parallels can be drawn between the events visited, although each had their own traits. In general, hitchhiking related events appear to attract roughly equal numbers of women and men. The gatherings were frequented largely by people who are currently travelling or aspiring to a travelling lifestyle, while the races served more as a holiday getaway for people with a steady residence and an occupation as student, freelancer, or employee. Most participants of all the visited events were in their early twenties, still many around age 30, but each event except BreakOut also attracted some attendees age 50 or older.

The organizational effort and rigor put into the events was quite varying. Three of the events were significantly supported by local activist collectives, the Zelle 79 collective in Cottbus, the Schijnheilig collective in Amsterdam and the Caracoles collective in St. Laurent du Pape. The German hitchhiking championship needed little more than a


\textsuperscript{288} Mukerji 1978. p. 241.
campground at the start and destination sites, some printouts and a few medals. The hitchgathering mainly needed a site to invite people to, and a few material things, like the zine library, to be brought, as the site was already well-equipped. Almost everything else was organized spontaneously. The nomads’ gathering needed a free location, a simple website and people to invite, coordinate, and accommodate speakers, presenters, and volunteers. BreakOut in contrast needed an app and website elaborately programmed, sponsors contacted for donations and goods, public relations conducted, communication with teams ensured, starter kits packed, authorities notified, and an emergency phone line staffed. Thus, this was the most organizationally elaborate event, which likely mobilized the greatest number of volunteers. The expectation of financial expenditure by participants also varied. At the hitchgathering, no spending at all was anticipated, and the nomads’ gathering’s attendees’ only expected expense was for accommodation if they failed to secure a couch. The German championship’s participants spent a little money on camping and food in Poland. At the BreakOut race, participants were largely prepared and expected to buy accommodation and food on the road, as well as their passage home.

Regarding an engagement with the hitchhiking community, the hitchgathering and nomads’ gathering demonstrated their commitment most prominently, and to a lesser degree so did the German championship, but not the BreakOut race. This engagement became apparent in an exhibited understanding of ‘hitchhiker’ not as a temporary role but as an identity, and as a category with which to address people. The community was frequently alluded to as a frame of reference. Efforts were made to demonstratively distance oneself from ‘mainstream’, authority and consumerism. Financial interactions were consciously minimized, needs satisfied by utilizing cooperation, commons, and leftovers. Furthermore, a connection to a conglomerate of progressive, critical, or radical factions and ideals, such as anarchism, feminism, environmentalism, veganism, human rights activism, and the inclusion of disadvantaged groups became apparent. The nomads’ gathering and hitchgathering, and to a lesser extent the German championship, negotiate hitchhiking explicitly within a context of alternative life trajectories and criticism of consumerist culture. This is not so in the BreakOut race, which is sponsored by several international corporations and so offers them an opportunity to gain exposure and advertize themselves in a context of philanthropy and adventure. Hitchhiking here is merely the vehicle to transport ideas of charity and adventure and is situated well within instead of alternative to a capitalistic market economy. The subversive potential of hitchhiking remains unacknowledged, as does the hitchhiking community. In contrast to the other events, I met no participants of BreakOut at the hitchgathering. BreakOut was
also the only event that was purposely made visible to the public through media exposure, and retains an organizational identity that is consistent throughout advertising materials, web presence, app, and t-shirts. While the German championship attracts some media coverage in the local press, the gatherings are both geared solely to their interest group and remain hidden from the general public.

The BreakOut race is in some sense the ‘odd one out’ among the visited events. While the other events were organized with a very low budget or no budget at all and relied significantly on support by local activists, volunteers, and participants themselves to shape the event, it was the most professionally organized and showed no connection to alternative political networks. And while the primary goals of the other events are varied, individualized, related to community building, and often tacit, that of BreakOut was clear: to generate as much in donations as possible. In this regard, it has been very successful.

4.2.2 The Role of the Internet

The internet takes several crucial roles for the hitchhiking community, as much of its members’ activities are sustained by it. As mentioned, the formation of a basis for community is attributed to certain networks, enabling connection, the sharing of knowledge, and the development of distinct group values. English is this community’s lingua franca, largely, but not entirely separating it from the larger and older Russian-speaking community.

Virtual communities are defined as interpersonal social networks that are highly diversified and specialized and based mostly upon weak ties, but still generate support and reciprocity through the dynamics of sustained interaction. Virtual communities like the one found on hitchwiki and elsewhere offer access to a distinct crowd from which to expand one’s social environment. Despite being suspected of fostering social isolation, net-based communication services in fact offer both the means to sustain and deepen previous social relations across vast distances, and to establish new relationships with people never physically encountered. The specific community under scrutiny here is largely based on internet-mediated communication which is then transformed into personal, face-to-face relationships between individuals who recognize each other as belonging to the same community:

290 BANSE 2006. p. 31.
“Individuals build their networks, on-line and off-line, on the basis of their interests, values, affinities, and projects. [...] On-line networks, when they stabilize in their practice, may build communities, virtual communities, different from physical communities, but not necessarily less intense or less effective in binding and mobilizing.”

This has enabled hitchers to develop “a communication hybrid that brings together physical place and cyber place [...] to act as the material support of networked individualism.” But it has also facilitated a certain conformism to develop:

“The internet gave us this, like this vector to like NORMALize our culture, like now (.) it, it’s kind of a, of a LOSS, when-when you think about it. //umm// Everyone (.) I-a-a-as with every culture you-you have a certain conformism.”

The development of community and belonging that the internet offered thus came, to some degree, at the price of individualism. Earlier online resources of hitching locations and information, such as websites operated by dedicated individuals, have been largely replaced by community resources. They had in turn partly supplanted printed materials that were circulated by hitchers. The internet is hitchhikers’ primary source of information on the practice, and their primary communication tool. They organize and advertise their meetings, and represent their perception of the practice to the public online. They offer resources, practical information, encouragement, and opportunities to find apprenticeship with experienced hitchers. The internet provides hitchhikers with a “sense of locality”, as it is routinely used to find hitching locations, lifestyle-specific information on specific routes and cities, and people willing to host or meet. Hitchwiki has even spawned hitchhikers’ own hospitality network, trustrooms. The space in which the community writes its own history is also largely online, where they collect and archive experiences, and gather data to generate statistics. So, while it is perfectly possible to hitchhike without the internet, the community formed around the practice would hardly be feasible offline.

4.2.3 Values, Attitudes, and Relationships

The two most fundamental values of hitchhikers are trust in strangers, and reliance on their own capabilities. They believe that people are generally kind, and that humans of all nations, backgrounds and life worlds are more similar than they are different. The numerous experiences of extraordinary hospitality, helpfulness, and kindness from

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292 Transcript Simon. p. 132.
293 E.g. veitkuehne.de, franknatur.e/strconv/hitchhike/hitchhike.htm [last accessed July 7th, 2016].
295 Transcript Chloe, p.139.
296 In general, hitchhikers appear to be quite tech-savvy and -positive, coding websites, creating and using special apps, and taking gadgets, such as a solar power charger, on their trips.
strangers convince hitchhikers that trust in strangers is worthwhile. In a predominant mental environment of fear and distrust, assured reliance on strangers “has become a rare and rebellious act.” 297 The hitchhiking community exhibits a high level of trust in strangers also among themselves. For example, at the two locations on the hitchgathering site where phones could be charged, they were left openly and unguarded. Hitchhikers’ phones are among the most financially valuable objects they carry. They thus demonstrated the conviction that the idea of a thief in their midst is unthinkable, and would rather risk losing their phones than exhibit mistrust in their fellow hitchers. Should their trust in strangers ever fail them, or their unpredictable way of travel entangle them in invidious situations, hitchhikers fall back on their own capability to react flexibly and inventively, of which they are quite proud.

The hitchhiker “engages in a process of rebelling against the subservience to modernity whilst nevertheless believing and trusting in the humanity of ideals.” 298 They value highly their self-determination and their skepticism of dominant discourses also beyond the dogmatic morality of stranger danger, and see their relation to the tourism industry as marginal. In making their own journeys, hitchhikers seek to create environments and experiences that represent their own social world more accurately, “or at least more accurately than any industry can offer or impose with hostels, trains, guidebooks or any institution that seeks to channel or nudge them through time-space.” 299 Globality and cosmopolitanism are highly esteemed, as are journeys that are perceived as particularly risky or difficult. There is no geographical or temporal limit to how far and long such journeys can be, and they lead through regions that are generally assumed to be very different from European ones, through deserts, very remote and rural areas 300, and across oceans. Exceptional hardship, such as hitchhiking with a wheelchair or a baby, warrants exceptional esteem, especially so if the tale is told with easygoing nonchalance. It appeared to me that in some cases, experienced hitchhikers had made their journeys intentionally harder for themselves by refraining from equipping themselves for certain situations 301, thus raising the challenge and creating their own drama. Hitchhikers take high stakes in such journeys, and thus demonstrate trust in their own capabilities, and their conviction that the universe will provide for those who take risks.

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299 O’Regan 2013. p. 44.
300 I have heard people take much pride in the fact that the local population had hardly ever seen a white person, or even that there was an anthropologist present, thus emphasizing how far removed from the tourist circuit they travelled.
301 E.g. prolonged journeys without shoes, tents, sleeping bags, phones, passports, maps, or entirely without money.
Hitchhikers generally exhibit a high tolerance and appreciation of difference, and a disdain for any discrimination of persons. They demonstrate strongly egalitarian dispositions, and respect for marginalized and prejudice-ridden groups. Some hitchhikers, particularly those identifying with the rainbow family\textsuperscript{302}, present themselves hippie-esquely, and express the attendant attitudes and interests, such as new age spirituality, esotericism, pacifism, yoga and meditation, and purity of body and mind. Many hitchhikers are vegetarians or vegans, but the dumpster diving expeditions also yielded meat and fish, the (non-)consumption of which separated the practically- from the philosophically-inclined vegetarians. Furthermore, many hitchhikers appear to have an interest in nature, hiking, and in organic agriculture.

There seemed to be widespread acceptance, or even celebration, of nonconforming expressions of gender, beauty, sexuality, and of queer identities. Many hitchhikers of all genders are thoroughly unshaven, and male hitchers in skirts raise no eyebrows. Hitchhikers generally appear to support the recognition of polyamory, bisexuality, and non-conforming genders. Homosexuality is self-evidently respected. Gender, like nationality and age, seems hardly to play a role during gatherings in general, men and women appeared to take part in all activities in similar measure. People appear to identify each other primarily as fellow travelers. The only moment when gender was explicitly made prominent was during the ‘Female Solo Travel’ workshop, from which men were initially excluded, but later invited to join. It was the only workshop to convene very nearly the entire hitchgathering, and also the longest, spanning the entire afternoon. The discussion gave men an opportunity to learn about women’s experiences, and what they can do to develop a better awareness of everyday sexism, and to support gender equity.\textsuperscript{303} A large proportion of hitchhikers identify as feminists, and this shapes their engagement with the practice. For instance, there was explicit awareness that a woman’s most effective defense against unwanted approaches, the fake (or real) wedding ring or mention of a boyfriend, is rooted deeply in patriarchy, as it deters those who would respect the property claim of another man more than a woman’s rejection. Not seldom, the deliberation of practical safety tips veered off into discussions of the ways the mobility of

\textsuperscript{302} The rainbow family is a loosely affiliated counter-cultural group of individuals and has no official spokes-person or agenda, but is gathered around ideas of pacifism, egalitarianism, and spirituality. Many members have a voluntarily marginal standing in society. The group holds rainbow gatherings, which last up to a full lunar circle, in the forests of North America and Europe, some of which attract thousands of people.

\textsuperscript{303} While many men already appeared to be well acquainted with and supportive of feminist ideas, some issues seemed to be new to others, and there were instances of behaviors the avoidance of which was one of the reasons female hitchhikers had excluded men in the first phase. Such behaviors include long and loud statements out of turn, overriding other speakers, and a stubborn unwillingness to hear and understand what women were saying. Most of these, however, originated from a single individual.
women is limited through the threat of rape, and of patriarchy and ownership. Some women spoke openly about their experiences of sexual harassment, assault, and rape. Female hitchers are aware of the perfidious mechanisms of victim blaming, and some circulate texts addressing the matter. Traveling women are acutely aware of the ways they present themselves and are perceived, and also of their power to renegotiate images of femininity. In general, hitchhikers appear to aim for consciousness of their own impact on the world, and of a wide range of social, political, and environmental issues. Not only individual hitchhikers grow into an alternative lifestyle, while embracing a degree of politicization. The community as a whole has also changed, from being largely apolitical and centered on fun, to more earnest efforts in sustainability and political action, which have become more pivotal to the gatherings as their advocates took on more central positions.

“The first one [I visited] I found it really quite (.) I don't really know what the word is. Earlier I said superficial, when I was trying to explain this to people. But I don’t know - very like, I don't know, naïve, like: Yeah! We’re all young (.) hitchhikers and just wanna get drunk and like, I don’t know [yeah]. Like, I think at this one I feel like, I feel like we’re growing up.”

As noted, hitchhikers’ political engagement is largely, but not exclusively situated in the policy fields of environmentalism, animal rights, and human, particularly migrant rights. In these networks, anarchism and feminism often play important roles in the way the organizations are structured, decisions are made, and in the way members relate to each other. Aspirations to self-organization, consensus and egalitarianism are often defining qualities. Particularly migrant rights issues were made prominent during the hitchgathering, and I know of several participants who travelled to the European border refugee camps of Berkasovo, Idomeni, and Dunkerque to volunteer after the gathering. It is not surprising that people who base their lifestyle on sustained international mobility would take an interest in border and migration issues. Most gathering participants hold EU passports and are keenly aware of the border crossing and visa privileges this entails. It makes sense, then, for them to press for freedom of movement for those who aren’t granted these liberties. Most hitchhikers have made intimate experiences of hospitality in many places and personally know people from many countries. Their experience tells them that people are more similar than they are different. Their own nation in contrast loses significance as a frame of reference and a locus of loyalty, and many


Transcript Eve. p. 9.

Obviously, the absence of hitchhikers without EU or Schengen passports can in part be accounted for precisely by the significant obstacles in the form of border regimes that they face.
hitchers will in my experience deny their nationality as a defining category, and rather identify with other imagined communities. In this way, borders drawn and enforced between people appear to the hitchhiker as arbitrary, overbearing, and oppressive.

To hitchhikers, the practice is “governed through appeals to ‘freedom’ and an individual desire to inscribe one’s own rhythm on the world”.\textsuperscript{307} Wanderlust and personal liberation go hand in hand. Inversely, many values associated with adulthood, such as commitment and responsibility, and striving for maximal security are seen as restrictive and overbearing. Hitchhikers distance themselves from certainty, a planned and foreseeable lifestyle, and the dominant instrumental rationality and efficiency paradigm, which to them appears oppressive.

Of course, it is hard to draw the line between a common mentality of those drawn to the hitchgathering and conformism indirectly enforced during the event, as subtle expectations, codes, and behavioral norms preclude the expression of certain attitudes.

“If I, if I go around and, and start letting everyone know that I think that nuclear power is a great idea, then people are gonna think I’m fucking weird, you know?”\textsuperscript{308}

It is not impossible for e.g. xenophobes, misogynists, homophobes, nationalists, or avid consumerists to be among the gathered crowd. They would simply be unlikely to advertise their convictions.

\textbf{Community Relationships and Networks}

It is noteworthy that hitchhikers value contacts to drivers especially for their experiences of difference, while they value those to other hitchhikers mainly for similarity. “I went, cause I kinda very like them, because I like the comfort of meeting the people where hitchhiking is normal.”\textsuperscript{309} Some interviewees mentioned not having any friends who hitchhike in their everyday social circles. Often, this goes along with not being able to talk about their passion, and with feelings of ostracization when one is perceived by others to be eccentric or reckless. It is thus one of the motivations to seek out gatherings and races, where hitchhiking is normalized and practitioners can feel understood. People appeared to sustain intense friendships with other hitchhikers, some of which they hardly ever meet outside the gatherings, making these encounters more precious and meaningful. Hitchhikers generally put much emphasis on sharing with each other,

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\textsuperscript{307} O’REGAN 2012. p. 128.
\textsuperscript{308} Transcript Simon. p. 132.
\textsuperscript{309} Transcript Sarah. p. 31.
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mostly in terms of ideas and skills, but also by refraining from demonstrating possessive attitudes.\textsuperscript{310}

As mentioned, the inner structure of the hitchgathering is largely non-hierarchical and egalitarian, and it is sometimes referred to as a micro-experiment in anarchistic community. The request of a new arrival to be taken “to your leader” was greeted with gleeful ridicule. Still, the hitchgathering’s organization and upkeep requires several tasks to be fulfilled, be they related to setting up, providing equipment, conducting the general assemblies, giving workshops, acquiring food, cooking communal meals, collecting and disposing of trash, or reciprocating to the Caracoles collective. Essentially, everyone is equally responsible for everything, and tasks are fulfilled by whoever attends to them. It is thus a question of consciousness and personal responsibility, and altogether worked rather well. But there was definitely a spectrum from people feeling a great sense of responsibility and performing a number of tasks to people who appeared to view the hitchgathering as a free holiday camp organized for them. The hitchgathering has no institutional structures, however:

“It is our contention that the unqualified attribution of egalitarianism to a community generally results from mistaking the absence of structures of differentiation – say, class, or formal hierarchies of power and authority – for the apparent absence of differentiation as such. The means by which people mark out and recognize status may often be concealed from the superficial ethnographer, masked as they often are, beneath protestations of equality and the paucity of institutional expressions of inequality.”\textsuperscript{311}

Personal responsibility for the community is one aspect of full participation, and taking on community tasks is one way of moving from peripheral to central positions. There were a few participants who can be described as charismatic leaders, people who took on responsibilities, were consulted on certain issues, spoke more than others, and were heard. While these attributes in no way gave them power to give orders to others or take community decisions alone, they did grant more subtle powers, and undermine the claim of the hitchgathering providing a completely egalitarian society.

The network of hitchhikers has many points of overlap with other networks, namely the rainbow family, ‘nomads’ information networks, and several activist networks. It appears that while a good number of people who hitchhike are not activists, most activists for certain causes are hitchhikers, specifically environmental and migrant rights activists.

\textsuperscript{310} Which may in fact lead to a certain entitlement, e.g. in the case of the pre-gathering, which was in a remote place, and collectively ran slowly out of food. Participants reported this not to be a problem at all, as each time supplies ran low, a new arrival appeared. The impression that arose from these reports was that the new arrival’s food supply was then instantly, unquestionably, and self-evidently collectivized.

\textsuperscript{311} COHEN 1995. p. 33.
Purity and Authenticity

The hitchhikers’ style of travel is inspired by a search for authenticity, a realness of encounters and experiences that no guidebook and no offer from the tourism industry can achieve:

“Like the flâneur attracted to the city’s dark corners, they hope for the chance encounters to confront the unexpected in a kind of counter-tourism that involves a poetic physical proximity with the marginal, and to experience supposedly ‘real’ ‘authentic’ life.”312

The road offers endless possibilities of transformative experiences, fortuitous encounters, and serendipitous moments to those who have the time, stamina, skills, and capabilities to truly give themselves up to fortune, to make themselves pure of any expectations and plans. In their greatest vulnerability lies the greatest potential for incidents experienced as ‘magical’ or ‘miraculous’.

The term ‘authenticity’ enlightens humanity’s age-old search for the real, the true, the genuine, the substantial. It carries classical meanings of trustworthy, reliable, warranted, or made by hand. Over the last centuries, it has grown in semantic breadth to a point where it can no longer be clearly defined. It is used in contexts of human behavior and experience, but also as a spiritual and monetary evaluation of material goods. It is a category of evaluation in aesthetics, art, religion, law, and the psyche, and has a long and contested history in folklore studies. It is a way of experiencing and being, esteemed to carry a high spiritual value that can be reified in objects. Tourism has developed a market for ostensibly authentic experiences and the materialized symbols of this authenticity in the form of souvenirs.313 But this ‘authenticity for tourists’ has long been exposed as an elaborate illusion314, and hitchhikers know it. They seek the most authentically authentic by aspiring not to be tourists at all, people who can be enticed to buy something because of its purported authenticity. Instead, they seek the closest possible connection to the local population, and do as they do. The authenticity of their experiences lies in the very fact that they are not made for tourists.

Hitchhikers seek to distinguish themselves not only from tourists and ‘mainstream’ consumerism, but also from the ‘wrong’ kind of hitchhiking. Many aspire to an idealized practice of hitchhiking, and no few find that it is not enough to simply hitchhike, one must also do it for the right reasons, the right way, and with greatest possible conse-

312 O’REGAN 2013. p. 45.
quence. They thus use these characteristics to delineate status and mark distinction within the community. While many hitchhikers will in some contexts pay for transport, or take flights, others appear to see this as contaminating. Going to the hitchgathering with any transport other than hitchhiking is considered ridiculous:

“My time was limited, [...] I was thinking about getting a blablacar lift to the gathering, and I thought that was the most hilarious like who, like, we’re going to a hitchhiking gathering, and (laughs) I was actually considering paying money [...] People would clearly ask me how I got there, and I’d be like: Oh, well I actually paid, that would be really stupid.”

Altruism is to some a normative ambition, and they disdain comments by newcomers that foreground the fact that hitching is free. They perceive the financial aspect not as a legitimate motivation, but as a side effect. Philanthropy is to them the most legitimate reason to hitch. The Route du Soleil race, on the other hand, stands in ill repute among some hitchhikers for its steep participation fee of 320€ and the all-inclusive character of the organization.

“And this is, these are like bit different kind of people, that just like, they want to have (.) some, an experience in hitchhiking in the life but it must be in this (.) setting like it’s, like, well, maybe they are like (.) we would, they don’t say it but: ‘We wouldn’t really hitchhike, but this is just, like a really cool race and you must have done it once in your life’.”

It is thus perceived as a ‘touristic’ foray into the practice by participants, and as lacking the spirit of ‘true’ hitchhiking. Few tried to make prominent their disengagement from ‘mainstream’ society in a way that allows them to see themselves as occupying the moral high ground, exhibiting a certain haughtiness:

“Some carry themselves with a self-evidence of moral superiority, a sublime contempt for all things mainstream, a merciless condemnation of the average citizen’s squandering of life time. Is it this arrogance that repels me?”

Others claimed the moral high ground for environmental reasons, which can also lead to sentiments of overbearing entitlement. When speaking about rejection from drivers, I heard hitchers express exasperation or indignation about the car proprietors’ decision, arguing that hitchhikers are doing something for the environment, and that this should be enough. They questioned the right to say ‘no’ without further justification, although in their interactions it is likely to be respected. It should be noted that the practice is merely environmentally neutral. However, such sentiments may root more deeply in experiences of frustration than in moralism.

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315 Transcript Leah. p. 49.
316 Transcript Peter. p. 28.
Of course, the behaviors described here disclose less about how persons actually enact and perform their travel practices, and more about how they want to be perceived, and what ideals of purity in practice, motivation, authenticity, and morality people aspire to.

**Self and Group Images**

When asked to describe hitchhikers in general, a few interviewees showed signs of discomfort and evasion, as if hesitant to attribute any characteristics to the entire community. Hitchhikers value individual expression highly, and saying anything about ‘all’ hitchhikers appeared to undermine individuality in the eyes of these hitchers. Most, however, did feel comfortable in making a few generalized statements, thus giving expression to their own view of the community, and of themselves as members of it. Many of the statements were made in terms of skills, capabilities, and personality traits that hitchhikers have. As has been shown, the mastering of skills is part of what it takes to become a hitchhiker, so it is not surprising that these would be experienced as commonalities. Equally, all hitchhikers have been shaped by their education on the road, and share the consequences of this education. In terms of socio-cultural and circumstantial characteristics, it was conjectured that many hitchhikers are from a middle-class, possibly urban background, and not from poverty, that they are often university educated, mostly white, and hold powerful passports. Many are well-connected with friends and family, but have no serious responsibilities for other persons, or other commitments, which allows them to take the time to travel nomadically as some do.

Interviewees mentioned a range of interpersonal skills, such as an acceptance of and openness to difference, language and conversation skills, and the ability to adapt their behavior to the conditions of the other. Hitchhikers’ sociability lies in their capacity of reading and relating to people, of being likable. Answers also invoked a range of personality traits. As mentioned, it can hardly be determined which of these are consequences, and which prerequisites of hitchhiking. Many alluded to a strong, extroverted personality type with descriptions like confident, assertive, forward, sociable, mentally tenacious, perseverant, courageous, brave, daring, willing to take risks, empowered, and self-reliant. Some stressed a more tender disposition with attributes like emphatic, caring, composed, relaxed, patient, instinctive, self-aware, conscious of their impact, and unprejudiced. Others put freedom at the center and described the hitchhiker as liberated, spontaneous, capable of improvisation, enjoying the unpredictable, autonomous, positive, independent, curious, and adventurous. And some painted the hitcher as a critic

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318 Which is, of course, circular reasoning when speaking about European hitchhikers: most European passports are among the most powerful in the world.
and progressive, emphasizing a tendency to question what they are told, a challenge of norms, mental autonomy, aversion to restrictions, disinterest in structures, plans, and rules, a social wisdom, and finally a fear of stagnation. Unsurprisingly, few mentioned personality characteristics that are unfavorable, as they were describing the community they identify with, and thus to a degree themselves. However, some conceded that hitchhikers can be quite unreliable and ‘flaky’, since they avoid commitment and change their mind a lot. Some may expect others to react flexibly and understandingly to this, a failure of which might be construed as repressive. In some cases, their carefree attitudes may be taxing to the less thoroughly relaxed. Another interviewee offered the generalization of being not much interested in hygiene, which did not seem to strike her as a disreputable property, but rather as an adaptation to given circumstances, and an expression of rebellion.

Hitchhikers were also described by their states of mind, and defined as people who are happy, carefree, open and welcoming to people and ideas, joyful, positive, free, and focused on the present. Others claimed a communal outlook on the world, evoking solidarity, positivity, optimism, a sense of freedom and adventure, openness, curiosity, and political awareness. They described the hitcher as looking at the world with a sense of communal enterprise and empowerment, uniting the self-proclaimed ‘tribe’ of hitchhikers with others who hold strong, independent worldviews, beliefs, and ideas in their quest for re-appropriation of a world which has become alienated. Their political stance is described as engaged and left-wing, involved in political networks to work against the scourge of neoliberal capitalism and the attendant exploitation, consumerism, and wastefulness. The hitchhikers’ way of relating to society is portrayed to be marginal and disassociated. While their understanding of society, people, and lifestyles is wide due to frequent contact, their position is construed to be voluntarily and consciously borderline. Some hitchhikers claim a shared experience of alienation, which led to disassociation from ‘mainstream’, ‘generic’ society, ‘normal’ people, societal norms and expectations, and to the assertion that experiences, not material things, are the most valuable thing in life to gain. Hitchhikers are thought to have an interest in sustainability, simplicity, minimalism, and do-it-yourself. Hitchers are moreover portrayed to be interested in cultures, languages, nature, and often new-age spirituality and self-growth. Further widely attributed interests are anarchism, activism, and anti-commercialism, sharing goods and ideas with others, and the gift economy. The belief that passing on kindness creates an endless ripple, eventually improving the world is assumed to be widely held.
4.3 The Hitchhiking Lifestyle

In contrast to people hitchhiking periodically, some travelers have integrated hitchhiking into a genuine lifestyle, spanning not only the person’s choice of mobility and leisure travel, but much of their spectrum of activity. Involvement in one interstitial practice often affects people’s access to knowledge about others. Consumption behaviors are one of the cornerstones of lifestyle constructions in modernity, and a refusal of consumption is no less so. This lifestyle may be sustained for years, but is enacted in utmost consequence only by few. It has been developed in accordance with the norms and values of the travelers’ milieu, which esteem sociability, frugality, sustainability, engagement, exchange, and hardship. The lifestyle encompasses not only how they move, but how they eat, sleep and dwell, how they work, conduct their relationships, acquire necessary objects, and how they spend their time.

“[T]he figure of the hitchhiker is the ideal anarchist theorist, actively engaged in social interactions at the point of least mediation through the normal structures of work, leisure, location and mobility - drifting easily between cultures and classes - yet also vulnerable to regulatory violence and social prejudice of those more conventional aspects of life.”

Modern full-time hitchhikers have their ideological forebears in several groups emphasizing freedom and wanderlust: in the working class wanderers of the 19th century, in the American tramps, and later in beatniks and hippies. Their description matches that of the 1970s drifter:

“the type of [inter-national] tourist [who] ventures furthest from the beaten track. He shuns any kind of connection with the tourist establishment. He tends to make it wholly on his own, living with the people and often taking odd-jobs to keep himself going [...]. The drifter has no fixed itinerary or timetable and no well-defined goals of travel.”

The uptake of variations of ‘drifting’ by millions of young people has since led to the formation of an institutionalized backpacker industry which is segregated from, but parallel to the mass tourism industry. This development has led to the need for new practices of distinction, of which hitchhiking is one.

Some hitchhikers have established veritable families of fellow travelers, which become to the hitchers their most intense and most important relationships. They roam together on a global scale. It is possible to hitchhike not only overland, but also through the air.

and across the sea in private planes and ships, and furthermore on trains, although in that case a clandestine passage as stowaway is more likely. Hitchhikers sustain themselves by accepting that which is freely offered\textsuperscript{324} to them, or taking that which left over, unwanted, or unused, sometimes without permission, slipping through the cracks of capitalism. They may make direct exchanges, e.g. by volunteering or house-sitting for food and shelter, or engage in less immediately personal reciprocity, e.g. in the form of hospitality exchange. The anti-consumerist networks upholding the gift economy recognize that “there is incredible potential in the power of the gift to challenge the very fabric of capitalist reality”\textsuperscript{325}, and that “the gift without return”\textsuperscript{326} delivers the strongest impact.

Hitchhikers come to see their interstitial practices not just as a way to make living without money feasible by providing for their needs, but also as a moral act. Their refusal to participate in the market economy is understood as a refusal to make themselves accomplice. They see themselves not as scavengers, but as people who counterbalance the wastefulness of modern western society, thus reducing its environmental impact. By trying to reduce impact, and volunteering for projects that seem meaningful to them, and supporting activist causes, they feel they are doing their part in making the world a better place. Most hitchhikers know that they are in many ways privileged, and could not live the way they do if they weren’t. Many hold powerful passports, have had access to education, and have a family they could fall back on.\textsuperscript{327} Most have no commitments or responsibilities that would hinder their travels, such as children or parents in need of care, or debt, and are not curtailed by illnesses or disabilities. They sustain their lifestyle in part through the spontaneous kindness of others, and believe in reciprocating by passing it on. They have little money but a lot of time, and look for occupations which seem meaningful and worthwhile to them because they are felt to contribute to advancing a better world. This is why hitchhiking and activism for human rights, animal rights, and the environment appear both meaningful and cogent to hitchhikers.

\textbf{4.3.1 Road Life}

Having no fixed place to call home and roaming the earth isn’t by any means exclusively negatively connoted. While sedentariness and presence have long been considered paramount duties of civic order and vagabonding has been disesteemed as a way to withdraw from social control, a shift in values has enabled different assessments. Today, also journeys of great length and high spontaneity can be increasingly acknowledged as

\textsuperscript{324} Although they may become quite skilled in facilitating the emergence of situations in which people may be enticed to offer their hospitality and generosity.


\textsuperscript{327} Although there are also those with a difficult family history.
forms of cultural education or legitimate leisure. In this way, nomads, vagabonds, and flâneurs become increasingly recognized and esteemed figures in the eyes of some.\textsuperscript{328} The road, not unlike the sea, is ever steeped in romanticism and imagery of adventure and freedom, and a whole genre of fiction and cultural representation is dedicated to its depiction. This infatuation with the road, its romance and mysticism stem from the functions it can provide: the romanticized and metaphorical road is at once an education, an escape, and a source of both environmental options, and new self-images.\textsuperscript{329} The road, and the restless mobility enacted on it, offers a protective anonymity and an opportunity to try out different identities in every new encounter.

“I always did it in like all the holidays I had, in the last two years of school, like every holiday I had, I went away hitchhiking somewhere, going there, going there. I had like a TOTAlly different life, like, school was like a totally different (.) life, like character of mine, then when I was on the road. I was a completely different person.”\textsuperscript{330}

It is a space in which another life is possible, and a place of nostalgia and romance.\textsuperscript{331} Travelers have a vested interest in reproducing this glamorous image of the road despite spending much of their time dealing with boring or incredibly inconvenient situations. The romance of the road colors their experiences and the tales they tell and sets them in front of a mystified backdrop that highlights the quasi-religious spirituality of hitchhiking journeys: there are experiences of damnation, purgatory, illumination, and salvation. There is the rapture and intoxication of success, the all-encompassing intensity of the present, and moments of serendipitous coincidence and ‘magic’. Choosing one’s own road name, as some hitchhikers do, is an expression of the making of self on the road, and emphasizes the quality of the journey as a rite of passage. The road is thus a metaphor for life itself.

As Chandra Mukerji noted in 1978, “hitchhikers take delight in identifying themselves as ‘bums’. “\textsuperscript{332} Not much has changed about this, images of vagrancy and dereliction are still at times glorified. But evoking a hobo romanticism is in fact a poor analogy:

“[T]he hobo and the tramp ordinarily derived from the lower reaches of society, and though they might come to value highly their nomadic way of life, they were often driven into it by necessity, whereas the drifter comes ordinarily from a middle or higher class home and is a tramp by choice.”\textsuperscript{333}

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\bibitem{329} See LAVIOLETTE 2016. p. 387.
\bibitem{330} Transcript Hannah. p. 115.
\bibitem{332} Mukerji 1978. p. 243.
\bibitem{333} Cohen 1973. p. 91.
\end{thebibliography}
While some hitchhikers do have a background in homelessness, most long-term travelers made an active choice to engage in moneyless practices and to live in voluntary simplicity, but not poverty. ‘Poverty’ describes an unwanted and restricting lack of resources, a deficiency that limits agency and adversely affects self-image. Voluntary moneylessness in contrast is a source of pride, a sense of agency and a positive identity configured by attributes such as autonomous, ingenious, resourceful, ethical, social, and liberated. In reality there appears to be little overlap between the circuits of hitchhikers and those of homeless persons. Although hitchers may sometimes attain supplies from the same spaces, most claim to be careful not to compete with destitute persons for limited resources, and therefore detract from those who need them more than they do. Although their economic capital may or may not be similar, hitchhikers have at their disposal social and (incorporated) cultural capital, as well as corporeal dispositions, that the homeless often do not. They interpret the kindness extended to them by others not in terms of charity, but rather hospitality. It is notable that many of those travelling without money do not in fact have no money. They rather see their moneyless practices as an expression of their anti-consumerist conviction, and also take pride in the challenge. The money they have is reserved for unavoidable expenses, and the more prudently they conserve it, the longer they can sustain their lifestyle.

Among those who engage in hitchhiking as a lifestyle, the definition of their identities in relation to the practice becomes more fluid than in those who only periodically engage in it, and otherwise lead a life that is largely deemed integrated and respectable by societal norms and expectations. As hitchhiking is only one of many nonconforming practices, they may subsume their identity as ‘hitchhiker’ under more encompassing identities, such as ‘nomad’, ‘rainbow’, ‘road dog’, ‘freegan’, or ‘anarchist’.

### 4.3.2 Hitchhiking Missionaries

Hitchhikers navigate space independently and collaboratively, while questioning norms about how people should interact, and how needs should be met. Some can technically be described by terms like homeless, poor, and non-integrated, but these terms are normative and defined by notions of lack, want, and absence. Long-term hitchhikers do not see a steady home, permanent local integration, a job, money, and material possessions as things they are lacking, but rather as things they have freed themselves from in order to be able to live life on different terms. They reject dominant notions of what constitutes a good life, and pursue alternative aspirations such as sustainability, collaboration, and self-actualization instead. They often feel tremendously liberated by this, and believe to have gained a certain wisdom of the world. They believe they are capable of changing the world by changing how they see it, and how they interact with it. They become aware that it is to some degree possible to liberate oneself from the constraints
of modernity, namely from dependency on money and from obedience to dominant social expectations. They are not hermits who have left society behind, but remain continually engaged with it. Their disassociation is mental, while their physical proximity is sustained. Hitchhikers spend considerable amounts of time in intimate co-presence with people from all walks of life, some of whom open themselves up quite vulnerably and speak about the troubles in their lives.

“This empowering //umm// aspect (.) can be used as a tool, like, to like, talk about with drivers. Cause a lot of drivers [...], they're living [...] in a different kind of sphere, where they have a car and they're driving (.) somewhere, usually alone, maybe they're in a business or whatever [...]. But like, I find it interesting that, like, like the things that, that you can learn as a hitchhiker, you can then, in this kind of like (.) like, being in a car with one other person as a lone hitchhiker, [...] you have this kind of connection, this intimate (.) conversation [...]. And [...] that can be a, like a chance, to-just to, like (.) //umm//( .) I don't know, [...] show to other people, like, how amazing the world can be in many different ways. Like, cause a lot of people are also, like, afraid of a lot of different things and (.) it's a common sort of topic of conversation.”

Some hitchhikers see in these intimate encounters the possibility of sowing seeds of doubt of the systems that many drivers are entangled in without ever seeing the possibility of challenging them: “[T]he hitchhiker offers us a glimpse of another kind of modernity; of alternative structures and associations beyond those defined by political, economic and social hierarchies, mobile or otherwise.” They thus spread the message that there is another, multifaceted world out there alternative to the dominant rationalities and life trajectories that often go unquestioned.

“I think that the, the space which is created, when you get into a car and you talk with the driver (.) I don't really know why, but it's kind of a place where people let, open themselves quite a lot. I had many drivers telling me really intimate stuff and talking about very important things in life, just twenty minutes after getting to know each other. [...] It's kind of a space of discussion, there are many people who are (.) kind of interested (.) I mean, I ask questions to the other people about what they are doing in their life. [...] And people, too, ask questions to me, so they (.) there are some people who just (.) cannot believe that you can live without money. Don't really understand it [...] but, still there are many people who, I had a feeling, who question themselves about their lifestyle. Most of all now, after economic crisis in Europe. Like, when I was in Spain, when I was in (.) yeah, in Italy and in Spain, I see this much more. Like, people REALLY question their lifestyles when they get to know (.) my lifestyle, and other people's lifestyles here.”

To evoke again a religious imagery: they feel that they have become in a way ‘enlightened’, and when an opportunity presents itself to proselytize others, they harness it.

334 Transcript Nathan. p. 145.
335 PURKIS 2012. p. 158.
336 Transcript Jacob. p. 103.
337 However, this is the extent of the metaphor’s scope of application, as hitchhikers will likely find uninvited and aggressive evangelizing of unwilling strangers to be unacceptable. Hitchhikers’ reliance on the wasted resources of others who operate within the market economy that they distance themselves from creates a somewhat paradoxical situation: in the unlikely event that they were to succeed in convincing the majority of their moneyless ways, they would become impossible.
5. Conclusion

Hitchhiking is far from being a utilitarian practice, a mere method to get from one point to another. It is equally far from being a haphazard activity, a journey of helplessly spiraling in winds of fortune and circumstance. “[The hitchhiker] has acted on that compelling need to live life intensely, to seek heights of physical and mental experience and to do so as if life itself was a fleeting voyage.”

Some consider the practice a sport, and some a technique, or even an art. Each conception puts different attributes of the hitchhiker into focus. The competitive hitcher defines themselves as an athlete, and emphasizes the mastering of the body that the practice requires. Those who speak of hitching in terms of technique indicate that it can be learnt, and perfected through practice and diligence. The hitcher is thus a person of skilled craft, and others may learn to be the same. Conceiving of hitchhiking as an art is the noblest form of recognition, and ascribes to the hitcher a talent and inspiration that cannot be transmitted to or awoken in those who don’t have it. It can only be fostered in those who do, thus making the hitchhiker an artist. These conceptions are always context-specific and sometimes self-serving, depending on what aspect one wishes to stress, and I met no person who would insist on a single definition. Conceptions from outside of the community declaring the practice to be begging, freeloadling, or an expression of recklessness, are refuted throughout.

Hitchhikers remain individualists. I have deliberately used the term ‘hitchhiker’ as an overarching concept without always specifying the peculiarities of practice and identification, because the term is used by the investigated community in this way. The stages of engagement implied here are not different levels of incarnation of the hitchhiker that arise naturally, one out of the other. Not everybody aspires to the same ideals, and not every hitchhiker identifies with the attitudes and worldviews described here to an equal extent. Each member of the community of hitchhikers may charge the concept with different notions of what it means to them, personally, to be a hitchhiker. Most, however, alluded to a profound effect that hitchhiking and an integration into the community has had on their life, and on how they perceive the world around them. It is a transgressive practice in that it refutes several dominant rationalities, most prominently the perception of strangers as inherently risky, and the supremacy of financial exchange. For many hitchers, this is only the first step on a path to nonconforming practices and attitudes that may come to encompass many domains of life and thought. Uptake of the practice can in this way serve as a rite of passage into an alternative adulthood, trans-

LAVIOLETTE 2016. p. 396.
cending gender, age, and nationality. Hitchhikers may understand their mobility as an athletic practice or as a form of meditation, as an exceptional holiday experience or as mundane mobility, as a school of life or as an act of rebellion. They may identify with the challenge and friction, or with the vulnerability and kindness inherent in the practice. They may see it as an exercise of letting go, of timetables, plans, routes, fears, expectations, and prejudices, or as an exercise of holding on, to hope, trust, solidarity, and humanity. They may see it as a path into political awakening and disassociation from dominant discourses, or as a consequence of it. They may see it as a way to withdraw themselves from social control, or as a way of re-appropriating an alienated world. Ultimately, some come to see it as a way of life.

Hitchhikers make no claim to have invented the wheel. Their practices, lifestyles, attitudes, and travel concepts have their forebears in the vagabonding ways of wanderers, tramps, beats, hippies, and drifters. Some see themselves as immediate descendants of the hippies, but others claim different lineages of conceptual history. Hitchhikers draw from a centuries-old tradition of romanticizing the road as a sphere of education, liberation, rites of passage, and a reinvention of the self. Hitchhiking allows practitioners the experience of personal agency, and enables them to seek connection across geographic, physical, political, social, and cultural boundaries. Instead of the institutionalized “faux hospitality” of the tourism industry, the hitchhiker finds real, spontaneous hospitality, and experiences authenticity in interactions and activities. They are challenged time and again to construct their identity, and to understand another’s point of view. While some conceive of their societal position as oppositional to the ‘mainstream’ and take pride in the fact of being perceived as deviant, the hitchhiker cannot afford to be a genuine outcast. They rely on the kindness of strangers, who are often situated well within ‘mainstream’ society. They must thus offer them a point of connection, something the stranger can recognize in the hitcher of themselves. However, all the self-presentation techniques described in this thesis only serve to facilitate a shorter wait - not employing any of them will hardly leave the hitcher stranded. It is simply a matter of stamina and patience. People hitchhike in groups, with dogs, be-dreadlocked, unwashed, and dressed in black. Hitchhiking is never impossible.

Hitchers’ motivations to continue the practice are differently weighted. People hitch for many reasons, and the longer they hitch, the more diverse their reasons become. Many were first prompted by sheer necessity, but quickly came to appreciate the ecological and economical advantages. The experience of freedom and adventure is another often-
cited motivation: as people challenge themselves to cope with the unpredictable, they liberate themselves from external and internal limitations to their journeys, thus opening themselves up for experiences of spontaneous hospitality and serendipitous coincidence. A fourth motivation is the social component, allowing the hitcher to break out of their social circle, learn from others, share their own views, and experience intimate connection in a strangely intense anonymity. But another reason to hitch lies in the potential to develop and alter self-images and identities, constructing a new image of oneself by coming to the realization of one’s capabilities, and by experiencing belonging in the community.

“I had this shame for a really long time. //umm// I would //umm// I would have never called myself a hitchhiker for a really really long time. I would be, you know like, that guy that sometimes hitchhikes. //umm// (.). But //umm// now //umm// (.). I //umm// now I (.) it’s probably the first time I say this (laughs). //uh// it’s, it’s, it’s be-, it’s become a part of my identity. I-I don’t mind saying that I am a hitchhiker. I’m not PROUD of it. (...) I guess I am proud of it.”

Assuming the identity of hitchhiker is a long journey that only begins with sticking out one’s thumb. The process encompasses much learning, as it is a knowledgably skillful identity, requiring the internalization of both the necessary practical actions and the appropriate attitudes. In the shared resources of hitchhikers, their repertoire of tactics is condensed into best practices, but the complexity of situated, tacit knowledge can never be portrayed. Successful hitchhiking relies on numerous types of knowledge and skills, from lay psychology, situational consciousness, and interpersonal tact over material organization and spatial awareness to embodied knowledge and mental control. Community engagement permeates the practice, when it is performed in such a way as to continually expand the ranks of drivers who would pick up a hitcher, and when solidarity is emphasized in encounters between unknown hitchhikers. The only way to learn is by doing, and the best way is through apprenticeship. Becoming a hitchhiker further entails the learning of community values, of the ways hitchhikers relate to each other, and of telling stories that are meaningful to them. The hitchhiking community of practice is the context in which a novice develops and positions themselves to the practices, norms, relationships, and identities appropriate to this community. In achieving mastery of the practice, while becoming increasingly integrated and esteemed, and taking on a broadening scope of tasks and responsibilities, they become old timers. This process may entail the introduction of changes into the community, as it is neither static nor discrete. The hitchhiking community is embedded in a larger counter-cultural context of alterna-

340 Transcript Simon. p. 133.
tive mobilities and communities on a global scale, from activist networks to the rainbow family and the nomadic travelers.

This thesis has been focused on European hitchhiking, but the phenomenon is global. In many places in the world, hitchhiking is normalized as a remedy for a lack of transportation options, and the more lonely the hitchhiker is on an empty rural road, the more likely to offer a lift is any vehicle passing by. No global history of the practice, which has spread across the planet in the wake of the automobile, is yet written. It can be assumed, however, that it is associated with different meanings, and has produced different norms, in the diverse places it is implemented in. It would also be interesting to elucidate possible communities of other languages, and it appears that there is no English academic literature on the significantly more mature Russian-speaking community. There appears to be a well-established scene of athletic hitchhiking, but about other contexts little is known. The state of the Russian literature on the matter remains for a scholar with a command of this language to evaluate. While languages partly separate hitchhikers, many are embedded in a global milieu of alternative travelers, the further development of which in a globalized world of diversifying options and shifting pressures could be a worthwhile area of inquiry.

The hitchhikers at the center of this investigation re-make themselves and re-make the(ir) world by changing their perception of it on the road. From the way they spend their time, interact, and relate to others to the way they engage with their surroundings, hitchhikers create an alternative reality by trying to redefine what is normal and self-evident. They acknowledge the power of small gestures to accumulate and change not only the way people see the world and themselves in it, but also the way it demonstrably is. Hitchhikers are a small, little noticed, and somewhat undercover interest group, yet in their unlimited geographical and social dispersion and the intimacy of their encounters with people from all walks of life lies the subversive power to change attitudes and encourage the questioning of norms. Hitchhiking has the potential to undermine order. While it presently appears unlikely to become again as popular and normalized as it once was, hitchhikers hope that by multiplying their numbers, some of the barriers that limit its popularity, namely shame, fear, and disrepute, may be overcome. They feel that they have gained a lot by hitchhiking, and that others, too, might to some extent be liberated, educated, and empowered by it.
6. Appendix

6.1 Literature & Resources


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6.2 Online Resources

**Hitchhiking Associations & Races**

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- ** Academy of Free Travel**: avp.travel.ru
- ** Autostopverein Schweiz**: autostopp.ch/en/hitchhiking-championship/
- **Blaffernationen**: blaffernationen.dk/blaf16/
- **BreakOut**: break-out.org
- **Bummit**: bummit.co.uk
- **Club of Roam - Autostop!**: tramprennen.org
- **Czech Hitchhiking Championship**: jedu.cz/cs/mistrovstvi-cr-v-autostopu
- **Deutsche Trampsport Gemeinschaft**: sporttrampen.de
- **Hitch-hikers of Ural**: autostop.grumblor.org/index.shtml.win.ru
- **HitchPro**: hitchball4000.fi
- **HungaroHitch**: hungarohitch.com/index.html
- **Īkšķojis Hitchhiking Race**: piedzivojumagars.lv/pied257v257jums.html
- **Polish Adventure Club**: klubprzygody.pl/index.php?strona=poddzial&dzial=autostop
- **Pouce d’Or**: poucedor.fr
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6.3 Table of Interviews

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Nationalities: 1x French, Indian, Italian, Polish, Scottish; 2x Dutch, English; 3x Australian, German

6.4 Table of Journeys

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<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Location(s)</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Dates travelled</th>
<th>Kms total</th>
<th>Lifts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>German Hitchhiking Championship</td>
<td>Cottbus, Germany - Pogorzela, Poland</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>May 22nd - 25th, 2015</td>
<td>1300</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>BreakOut Charity Race</td>
<td>Munich, Germany - Skagen, Denmark</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>June 3rd - 6th, 2015</td>
<td>2100</td>
<td>28</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nomads’ Gathering</td>
<td>Amsterdam, Netherlands</td>
<td>circa 150</td>
<td>July 17th - 21st, 2015</td>
<td>1000</td>
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<td>Annual European Hitchgathering</td>
<td>St.-Laurent-du-Pape, France</td>
<td>circa 160</td>
<td>August 1st - 9th, 2015</td>
<td>3000</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.5 Routes
6.6 Hitchhiking Stickers
6.7 Declaration


Ich versichere an Eides statt durch meine eigenhändige Unterschrift, dass ich die beiliegende Arbeit selbstständig und ohne fremde Hilfe angefertigt und alle Stellen, die wörtlich oder annähernd wörtlich aus Veröffentlichungen entnommen sind, als solche kenntlich gemacht habe. Außerdem habe ich mich keiner anderen als der angegebenen Literatur, insbesondere keiner im Quellenverzeichnis nicht benannten Internet-Quellen, bedient. Diese Versicherung bezieht sich auch auf zur Arbeit gehörige Zeichnungen, Skizzen, bildliche Darstellungen etc. Weiterhin entspricht die eingereichte schriftliche Fassung der Arbeit der Fassung auf dem eingereichten elektronischen Speichermedium.

Mit der späteren Einsichtnahme in meine Hausarbeit erkläre ich mich einverstanden.

.................................................. ..........................................................
Datum Unterschrift